

Expressionism

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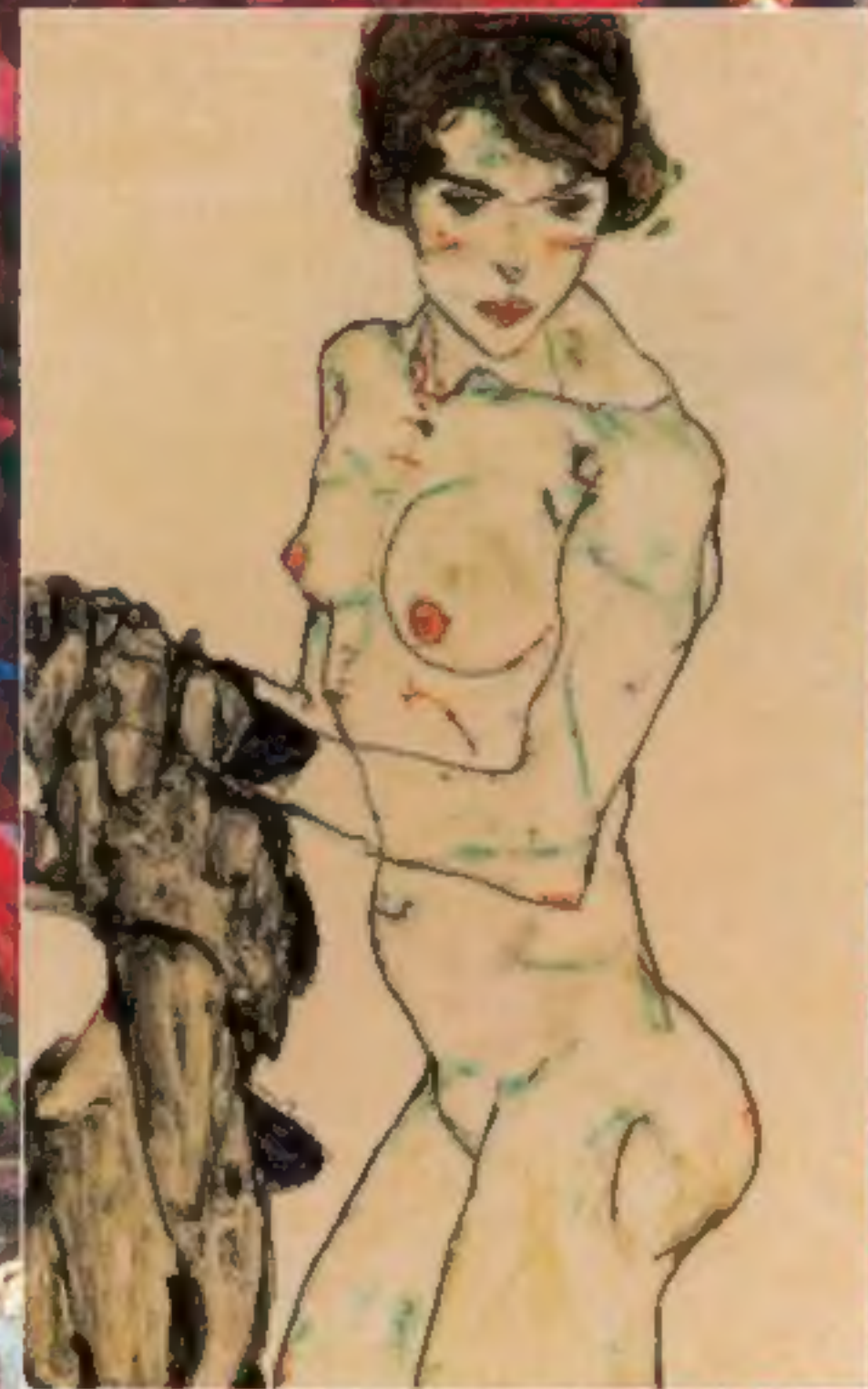
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Ashley Bassie

EXPRESSIONISM



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WHAT IS EXPRESSIONISM?

Expressionism has meant different things at different times. In the sense we use the term today, certainly when we speak of “German Expressionism”, it refers to a broad, cultural movement that emerged from Germany and Austria in the early twentieth century. Yet Expressionism is complex and contradictory. It encompassed the liberation of the body as much as the excavation of the psyche. Within its motley ranks could be found political apathy, even chauvinism, as well as revolutionary commitment. The first part of this book is structured thematically, rather than chronologically, in order to draw out some of the more common characteristics and preoccupations of the movement. The second part consists of short essays on a selection of individual Expressionists, highlighting the distinctive aspects of each artist’s work.

Expressionism’s tangled roots range far back into history and across wide geographical terrain. Two of its most important sources are neither modern, nor European: the art of the Middle Ages and the art of tribal or so-called “primitive” peoples. A third has little to do with visual art at all – the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. To complicate matters further, the word “Expressionism” initially meant something different. Until about 1912, the term was used generally to describe progressive art in Europe, chiefly France, that was clearly different from Impressionism, or that even appeared to be “anti-Impressionist”. So, ironically, it was first applied most often to non-German artists such as Gauguin, Cézanne, Matisse and Van Gogh. In practice, well up to the outbreak of the First World War, “Expressionism” was still a catch-all phrase for the latest modern, *Fauviste*, Futurist or Cubist art. The important *Sonderbund* exhibition staged in Cologne in 1912, for example, used the term to refer to the newest German painting *together* with international artists.

In Cologne though, the shift was already beginning. The exhibition organisers and most critics emphasised the affinity of the “Expressionism” of the German avant-garde with that of the Dutch Van Gogh and the guest of honour at the show, the Norwegian Edvard Munch. In so doing, they slightly played down the prior significance of French artists, such as Matisse, and steered the concept of Expressionism in a distinctly “Northern” direction. Munch himself was stunned when he saw the show. “There is a collection here of all the wildest paintings in Europe”, he wrote to a friend, “Cologne Cathedral is shaking to its very foundations”. More than geography though, this shift highlighted Expressionist qualities as lying not so much in innovative formal means for description of the physical world, but in the communication of a particularly sensitive, even slightly neurotic, perception of the world, which went beyond mere appearances. As in the work of Van Gogh and Munch, individual, subjective human experience was its focus. As it gathered momentum, one thing became abundantly clear – Expressionism was *not* a “style”. This helps to explain why

Edvard Munch,
Madonna, 1893-1894.
Oil on canvas, 90 x 68.5 cm.
Munch-museet, Oslo.



Oskar Kokoschka,
Dents du Midi, 1909-1910.
 Oil on canvas, 80 x 116 cm.
 Private collection.

Egon Schiele,
Autumn Sun I (Rising Sun), 1912.
 Oil on canvas, 80.2 x 80.5 cm.
 Private Collection.

curators, critics, dealers, and the artists themselves, could rarely agree on the use or meaning of the term.

Nonetheless, "Expressionism" gained wide currency across the arts in Germany and Austria. It was first applied to painting, sculpture and printmaking and a little later to literature, theatre and dance. It has been argued that while Expressionism's impact on the visual arts was most successful, its impact on music was the most radical, involving elements such as dissonance and atonality in the works of composers (especially in Vienna) from Gustav Mahler to Alban Berg and Arnold Schoenberg. Finally, Expressionism infiltrated architecture, and its effects could even be discerned in the newest modern distraction – film.

Historians still disagree today on what Expressionism is. Many artists who now rank as quintessential Expressionists themselves rejected the label. Given the spirit of anti-academicism and fierce individualism that characterised so much of Expressionism, this is hardly surprising. In his autobiography, *Jahre der Kämpfe* (Years of Struggle), Emil Nolde wrote: "The intellectual art literati call me an Expressionist. I don't like this restriction".





Vast differences separate the work of some of the foremost figures. The term is so elastic it can accommodate artists as diverse as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Paul Klee, Egon Schiele and Wassily Kandinsky. Many German artists who lived long lives, such as Max Beckmann, George Grosz, Otto Dix and Oskar Kokoschka, only worked in an “Expressionist” mode – and to differing degrees – for a small number of their productive years. Others had tragically short careers, leaving us only to imagine how their work might have developed. Paula Modersohn-Becker and Richard Gerstl died before the term had even come into common use. Before 1914 was out, the painter August Macke and the poets Alfred Lichtenstein and Ernst Stadler had been killed on the battlefields. Another poet, Georg Trakl, took a cocaine overdose after breaking down under the trauma of service in a medical unit in Poland. Franz Marc fell in 1916. In Vienna the young Egon Schiele did not survive the devastating influenza epidemic of 1918, and Wilhelm Lehmbruck was left so traumatised by the experience of war that he took his own life in Berlin in 1919.

It is easier to establish what Expressionism was *not*, than what it was. Certainly Expressionism was not a coherent, singular entity. Unlike Marinetti’s Futurists in Italy, who invented and loudly proclaimed their own group identity, there was no such thing as a unified band of “Expressionists” on the march. Yet unlike the small groups of painters dubbed “Fauves” and “Cubists” in France, “Expressionists” of one hue or another, across the arts, were so numerous that the epoch in German cultural history has sometimes been characterised as one of an entire “Expressionist generation”.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Street, Dresden, 1907-1908.
Oil on canvas, 150.5 x 200.4 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



The era of German Expressionism was finally extinguished by the Nazi dictatorship in 1933. But its most incandescent phase of 1910-1920 left a legacy that has caused reverberations ever since. It was a period of intellectual adventure, passionate idealism, and deep yearnings for spiritual renewal. Increasingly, as some artists recognised the political danger of Expressionism's characteristic inwardness, they became more committed to exploring its potential for political engagement or wider social reform. But utopian aspirations and the high stakes involved in ascribing a redemptive function to art, meant that Expressionism also bore an immense potential for despair, disillusionment and atrophy. Along with works of profound poignancy, it also produced a flood of pseudo-ecstatic outpourings and a good deal of sentimental navel-gazing. This book will give a wide berth to some of the murkier by-products of a genuinely radical project.

Some of the most stunning products of German Expressionism came from formal public collaborations as well as intimate working friendships. There were elements of both in the groups most important for pre-war Expressionism, the *Brücke* (Bridge) and *Blaue Reiter* (Blue Rider), for instance. Fierce arguments were conducted and common ground was staked out in journals such as *Der Sturm* (The Storm) and *Die Aktion* (Action), as well as in the context of numerous group exhibitions. Others came from introspective loners working in relative isolation. Crucially, this was also an age shattered by the crisis of a devastating technological war and in Germany, its most debilitating aftermath. The conflict and trauma of the period is inseparable from the forms Expressionism took, and ultimately, from its demise.

Edvard Munch,
Evening on Karl Johan Street, 1892.
 Oil on canvas, 85.5 x 121 cm
 Bergen Art Museum,
 Rasmus Meyers Collection, Bergen



“GERMAN” ART?

Expressionism's Origins and Sources

This chapter explores the rich mixture of ideas, debates, influences and sources that contributed to the way Expressionism developed in Germany. It also introduces the two key groups of pre-war Expressionism; *Die Brücke* in Dresden and *Der Blaue Reiter* in Munich.

Art in late nineteenth-century Wilhelmine Germany was dominated by professional institutions, such as the Academy, and by artistic conventions, such as the emphasis on historical and literary subjects as those most worthy for public exhibition. The mixture of intricate realism, patriotism and cosy sentimentality in Anton von Werner's *Im Etappenquartier vor Paris* (In a Billet outside Paris) exemplifies well “official” taste in the 1890s. As soon as it had been completed, it was bought for the *Nationalgalerie*. The painting shows a comradely group of soldiers relaxing to the strains of a *Lied* by Schumann, *Das Meer erglänzte weit hinaus*, played and sung by two lancers. The setting is a requisitioned chateau just outside Versailles during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. Their bluff manliness – all muddy boots and ruddy cheeks – and wholesome love of German *Kultur* is very deliberately contrasted with the effete rococo fussiness of French *Zivilisation* in their surroundings. Von Werner was director of the Berlin Academy and the most powerful figure in the institutional German art world at the time. He was also the favourite of Kaiser Wilhelm II, himself notoriously opinionated, conservative and outspoken in his views on art.

All the more shocking, then, was the work sprung on an unsuspecting public at the newly-opened headquarters of the conservative *Verein Berliner Künstler* (Union of Berlin Artists) in 1892. It was by a Norwegian artist then still unknown in Germany, but who would inspire many Expressionists in the decades to follow – Edvard Munch (p. 12). He had been invited to exhibit and arrived with fifty-five works, including one or more versions of *The Kiss* (p. 15). This image re-surfaced many times in Munch's oeuvre. For him, it was tied up with the idea of the destructiveness of passion. He meant this not in terms of its potential for social disgrace, but more profoundly: a woman's passion had the power to enslave men, arouse jealousy and – here almost literally – eat into the strength of the individual. When Erich Heckel met Munch in 1907, Munch offered the young German artist his Strindbergian view of women: “*Das Weib ist wie Feuer, wärmend und verzehrend*”. (“Woman is like fire, warming and consuming”.) If we try to imagine the effect images like Munch's had on the conservative “establishment”, we can also understand something of the sexual insecurities of the age. Critics scorned Munch's pallid colours, likening them to a housepainter's undercoat. But more than considerations of technique, it was the subjects of Munch's work that offended conservative sensibilities. The writer, friend and biographer of Munch, Stanislaw Przybyszewski, articulated the most unsettling aspect of *The Kiss* when he noted of the figures that:

Edvard Munch,
Self-Portrait with Cigarette, 1895.
Oil on canvas, 110.5 x 85.5 cm
Nasjonalmuseet for Kunst, arkitektur og
design, Oslo.

“We see two human figures, each of the two faces melting into the other. Not a single recognisable facial feature remains: all we see is that point where they melt, a point that looks like a huge ear, rendered deaf by the ecstasy of the blood. It looks like a pool of molten flesh there’s something hideous in it”.

To the cultured men of the *Verein*, with their taste for heroic battle scenes and history painting, *The Kiss*, along with Munch’s other deeply introspective syntheses of the taboos of sex, death and intense emotion, were anathema. Add to this the howls of protest from the press and it is no surprise that the exhibition was closed after just one week. Paradoxically, the scandal did more for Munch’s career than any other event. In fact, it made his name in Berlin almost overnight. Munch wrote a letter home from Berlin to Norway.

“I could hardly have received better advertising ... People came long distances to see the exhibition ... I’ve never had such enjoyable days. It’s incredible that anything as innocent as art can create such furore. You asked me whether it has made me nervous. I’ve gained six pounds and have never felt better”.

The incident had far-reaching ramifications. It caused a rift between liberal and conservative members of the *Verein* that ultimately led to the foundation of the more progressive Berlin Secession. A decade later, Munch was to become a rich source of inspiration for Expressionist artists as they explored ways of giving form to subjective perception and emotional states, rather than mimesis and anecdote.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, two of Germany’s most distinctive and original artists were women Paula Modersohn-Becker and Kathe Kollwitz. Kollwitz had a long, prolific career that lasted from the 1890s until her death – just days before the end of the Second World War – well after Expressionism’s demise. Like Munch, her work often deals with profound emotion, birth, suffering and death. But it is otherwise very different. His work emerged from a Symbolist, bohemian milieu, pungent with sex and decadence on the one hand, and a highly personal, subjective sensitivity to the natural sublime on the other. Hers came from a Realist tradition of humane socio-political engagement and fundamental philanthropy. Kollwitz was primarily a graphic artist, making works on paper ranging from brief, gestural drawings to numerous versions of intricate etchings, finely tuned to the effects of subtle tonal variations.

Unlike Kollwitz, Paula Modersohn-Becker died young, before “Expressionism” even came into common parlance. Groups like the *Brücke* in their early phases knew little or nothing of her work. Emil Nolde met her in Paris in 1900, but this was before she had developed the style on which her posthumous reputation came to rest. Nonetheless, she is an interesting precursor of Expressionism.

As a woman artist, Modersohn-Becker was not admitted to the traditional Academy. She trained instead at a single-sex school in Berlin and then at the Colarossi Academy in Paris. Her work was greatly stimulated by her first-hand experience of art in the French capital, above all by Cézanne, Gauguin, Rodin and collections of Japanese art. However, her most powerful subject-matter was drawn from the German provincial countryside. She joined the established artists’ colony at Worpswede, a small village in the marshy, moorland landscape near Bremen in the north of Germany in 1898. In so doing, she was taking part in a growing

Edvard Munch,

The Kiss, 1897.

Oil on canvas, 99 x 80.5 cm.

Munch-museet, Oslo.

Paula Modersohn-Becker,

Trumpeting Girl, 1903.

Oil on canvas.

Kunstsammlungen Böttcherstraße,

Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum,

Bremen.

Paula Modersohn-Becker,

Old Woman in Garden, 1907.

Oil on canvas.

Kunstsammlungen Böttcherstraße,

Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum,

Bremen.









tradition of creative retreats into the countryside. Other established artists' colonies included Pont-Aven in France and St Ives in Britain. "Going away" appealed to artists in search of uncorrupted nature, colourful indigenous traditions and close-knit community.

In short, what many were seeking was life untouched by the ruptures of capitalist modernity. In fact, such artists' colonies were themselves products of the railway age, the tastes of urban art markets and modern, exoticising fantasies about the folk cultures of distant provinces. In the case of Modersohn-Becker, the landscape, local inhabitants and fellow artists at the Worpswede colony provided her with conditions in which she was able to develop a highly personal style. Her monumental portrait of an old woman from the local poorhouse (p.17) is remarkable for the strong sense of design, semi-abstract forms, and the finely tuned evocation of the shadows and fading glow of the Northern twilight. Even more striking is the sense of powerful, dignified human presence with which she has endowed the old woman.

Modersohn-Becker was often ambivalent about the Worpswede life and felt a *lack* of stimulation there. She married another Worpswede artist, Otto Modersohn, but her antidote to the colony's insularity was Paris (which she called the "world"). She was a sophisticated artist, but in her drive for directness and truthfulness, she avoided sentimentalising or romanticising her subjects. This is part of what distinguishes her work from that of artists who went into the countryside looking for subjects to match their own or their collectors' received ideas of the countryside. She died in 1907, aged thirty-one, a few weeks after giving birth to a daughter.

Another member of the Worpswede colony and a close friend, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, dedicated a requiem, full of images of life and fertility, to her:

For you that understood: the heavy fruit.
You placed it there in front of you on platters
And balanced then its heaviness with colour.
And much like the fruit you also saw the woman,
And you saw children thus: intrinsically –
Driven into the forms of their existence

The tension between cosmopolitan modernity and indigenous nature was an important political factor in debates around Germany's artistic heritage and future. The concept of "German Art" was controversial before, during, and after the era of Expressionism. But it was an especially contested issue in Wilhelmine Germany – from unification in 1871 until the empire's collapse in 1918.

At that time, discussion of modern art was often tied to concerns for German national identity. Julius Langbehn's nationalist *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Rembrandt as Educator), published in 1890, became an instant best-seller. Langbehn had no qualms about defining Rembrandt as German, who, along with Goethe and Luther, constituted the "culture" that would be "the true salvation of the Germans". His book diagnosed contemporary Germany as a culture in decline, threatened on all sides by internationalism, science, democracy – in short, by modernity. The nationalist cant of anti-modernism was taken up in the following decades by, amongst others, Carl Vinnen, a conservative painter of landscapes, also from Worpswede. He published an inflammatory collection of texts, signed by 118 artists, under the title *Ein Protest deutscher Künstler* (A Protest of German Artists) in 1911.

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff,

After the Bath, 1912

Oil on canvas, 84 x 95 cm.

Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden,
Galerie Neue Meister, Dresden



Paula Modersohn-Becker,
Self-Portrait with Camellia, 1906-1907.
Oil on wood, 61 x 30.5 cm.
Museum Folkwang, Essen

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Dodo and Her Brother, 1908-1920.
Oil on canvas, 170.5 x 95 cm.
Smith College Museum of Art,
Northampton

Vinnen had become embittered at the purchase by the museum in Bremen of an expensive landscape by Van Gogh. In spite of his Dutch roots, Van Gogh was equated with what Vinnen saw as the "great invasion of French art". Furthermore, "French art" soon came to stand for modernism in general, including Expressionism.

An ardent defence, in the form of a published counter-statement *Im Kampf um die Kunst* (The Struggle for Art) was quickly mounted by the pro-modernist camp: progressive artists, writers and collectors. They included the art historian Wilhelm Worringer, members of the emerging *Blaue Reiter* circle and Max Beckmann. Although Expressionist art itself was often quite strikingly apolitical, this early conflict in its history highlighted the cultural-political dimension of the *issue* of Expressionism in the German context. This became especially clear in the 1930s when theorists on the Left debated retrospectively the successes and failures of Expressionism, and the campaign against modernism, internationalism and Expressionism re-ignited with greater violence in the form of the National Socialists' campaign against so-called *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art).

What became Expressionism, in the sense it has now, first began to emerge just a few years into the new century. In Dresden, a group of young architecture students at the city's Technical University began meeting to read, discuss and work together in Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's student lodgings. Dissatisfied with conventional academic art training, they organised informal life-drawing sessions using a young model, with short poses that they were only able to capture in quick, decisive, "courageous" lines, as one of them, Fritz Bleyl, put it. This way of working liberated them from the academic practices of drawing meticulously from a model in stiff, eternal poses, working from dirty old plaster casts, or copying slavishly from the Old Masters. By 1905, they decided to formalise their independent group, chiefly for exhibition purposes. They drew, painted and made prints, first in an improvised studio space organised by Erich Heckel – it was an attic in his parents' house in the Friedrichstadt district – and later in a series of other studios in the neighbourhood.

An important early statement of intent came in 1906. In the catalogue to their first group exhibition, held in Löbtau, Dresden, they issued their rallying cry. This was in the form of a founding "manifesto" of the *Künstlergruppe Brücke* (Bridge Artists' Group). Printed in stylised, quasi-primitive lettering, the text reads:

WITH FAITH IN DEVELOPMENT AND IN A NEW GENERATION OF CREATORS AND APPRECIATORS, WE CALL TOGETHER ALL YOUTH. AS YOUTH, WE CARRY THE FUTURE AND WANT TO CREATE FOR OURSELVES FREEDOM OF LIFE AND OF MOVEMENT AGAINST THE LONG-ESTABLISHED OLDER FORCES. EVERYONE WHO WITH IMMEDIACY AND AUTHENTICITY CONVEYS THAT WHICH DRIVES HIM TO CREATE, BELONGS WITH US.

The "drive" to create came from the core members of the *Brücke* group: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff and Fritz Bleyl. Bleyl left the group in 1907 to pursue a career in architectural design. Max Pechstein and the Swiss artist Cuno Amiet joined in 1906. Upon invitation, Emil Nolde, an older artist, became a member for a short while (1906-1907) and later they were joined by Otto Mueller.





The woodcut medium was central to the *Brücke* from an early stage. In painting, although there were differences between individual artists' work, the early canvases are often characterised by intense, non-naturalistic colouring and loose, broken brushwork. They reveal a lively engagement with recent art in Europe. Kirchner, Heckel and others absorbed and worked through the implications of modern international art; of French postimpressionism – Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat and Van Gogh – and, a little later, of Matisse and Munch. These artists' work could be seen in numerous exhibitions across Germany at the time. It was widely documented and debated in the art press and in influential books such as Julius Meier-Graefe's monumental *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* (History of the Development of Modern Art), published in 1904.

Jugendstil, the turn-of-the-century reform movement in the decorative arts, also made an impact on the *Brücke* in its infancy. The sinuous contours of the *Jugendstil* aesthetic appear in some early *Brücke* prints. More fundamental principles of the movement, such as the desire to renew the arts and break down traditional barriers between the fine and applied arts, are also echoed in some of the ideals of the emerging Expressionist movement.

Like many avant-garde artists across Europe, the *Brücke* discovered a new world of form, materials, imagery and symbolism in the art of non-western cultures. Their imaginative response to African and Oceanic cultures was part of the wider phenomenon of "primitivism", often rooted in Western exoticising fantasies. But in the German Expressionist context, this was also part of a search for collective "origins", going back to the elusive "essence" of human creativity. Many of the idealised notions of directness, instinctiveness and authenticity at the core of Expressionist ideology are related to the *Brücke's* and other Expressionists' interest in the traces of "primitive" cultures reproduced through the media of ethnography.

In an interesting variant on the Expressionist search for "authentic" origins, Mueller was drawn to the gypsy communities of Eastern Europe, travelling to Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria in the 1920s to paint and study them. He often painted his subjects using tempera on rough canvas, giving his works a "dry" and deliberately unpolished quality. Mueller seems to have felt a strong personal affinity with the gypsies he painted – his mother came from a gypsy family, but had been abandoned as a child.

Finally, Expressionism involved a unique and complex confrontation with another powerful source; that of the German artistic past. There is an intricate connection between German Expressionism and the art of the Middle Ages. In some ways, the Expressionists' "rediscovery" of the medieval Gothic was related to the wider primitivist project – the search for what they imagined as "pure", authentic, vital art. For many, the art of the Middle Ages possessed a powerful integrity. Its handcraft traditions and expressive, non-naturalistic forms, resonant of profound piety, were understood as the product of an intuitive tradition.

Emil Nolde, whose own politics tended towards the *volkisch*-nationalist, responded passionately to the art of so-called "primitive" peoples, or *Urvölker*, but, in keeping with Expressionism's anti-academic stance, he was dismissive of art-historical orthodoxy. Ironically, the history of "great art" that he takes issue with was the legacy of a Prussian:

Wassily Kandinsky,
Sketch for the cover of the *Blaue Reiter*
almanach, 1911.
Watercolour, 28 x 20.5 cm.
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
Munich

the antiquarian and “father of art history”, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) An early draft of a book on tribal art that Nolde wanted to publish began:

“1. ‘We see the highest art in the Greeks. In painting, Raphael is the greatest of all Masters.’ This was what every art pedagogue taught twenty or thirty years ago.

“2. Some things have changed since then. We don’t like Raphael and the sculptures of the so-called flowering of Greek art leave us cold. Our predecessors’ ideals are no longer ours. We like less the works under which great names have stood for centuries. Sophisticated artists in the hustle and bustle of their times made art for Popes and palaces. We value and love the unassuming people who worked in their workshops, of whom we barely know anything today, for their simple and largely-hewn sculptures in the cathedrals of Naumburg, Magdeburg, Bamberg”.

In the spirit of the German Romantics of the early nineteenth century, many of the Expressionist generation felt cut off from the spiritual traditions of the past by Enlightenment rationalism. Filtered through the prism of Romanticism, the image of communal brotherhoods of anonymous craftsmen working together to build the great cathedrals of Europe awakened utopian longings for a similar sense of altruistic creative collaboration – the foundation of the Bauhaus in 1919 would also draw on the idea as a model. Cathedral-building could even be a symbol of longed-for unity Groups such as the quasi-medieval *Lukasbund* (League of St Luke), better known as the Nazarenes, had formed in the early nineteenth century on the basis of similar longings, though the monastic element of that group’s creed – the *Lukasbund* lived a frugal, communal life devoted to art in the monastery of San Isidoro in Italy – was eschewed by many Expressionists, who generally opted for bohemian hedonism as their means to renounce bourgeois values.

Many Expressionists wanted to revitalise not only art *per se*, but specifically *German* art. It was therefore logical that they looked to Northern European traditions for both inspiration and a sense of self-identity Artists such as Durer, Cranach and Grünewald were singled out as Masters of the *Spätgotik* (late Gothic). This categorisation emphasised their Germanic heritage and their separateness from the Italian Renaissance. For many in the early twentieth century, Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece*, with its the harrowing image of Christ’s crucifixion epitomised the inherently expressive qualities of “German” art. Widely-read books, such as Wilhelm Worringer’s *Formprobleme der Gotik* (Form in Gothic) of 1912, presented an account of the *Kunstwollen*, or “will to art” of the German Gothic that chimed with the spirit of Expressionism. Kirchner kept a volume of Dürer’s drawings close at hand for much of his life. For artists such as Kirchner, Nolde and many others, these forefathers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries exhibited qualities they sought to nurture in their own radical new work.

In 1910, Kirchner painted *Standing Nude with Hat*, a work that draws directly from a sixteenth-century image (p.29). He attached enormous emotional and professional importance to the painting, regarding it as one of his most significant early works and as an image of his ideal of feminine beauty at the time. The woman is Dodo, Kirchner’s then girlfriend, who appears in many of his Dresden works. However, Kirchner was working from another, much older “model” too – the seductively smiling Venus painted by Lucas Cranach the Elder in 1532

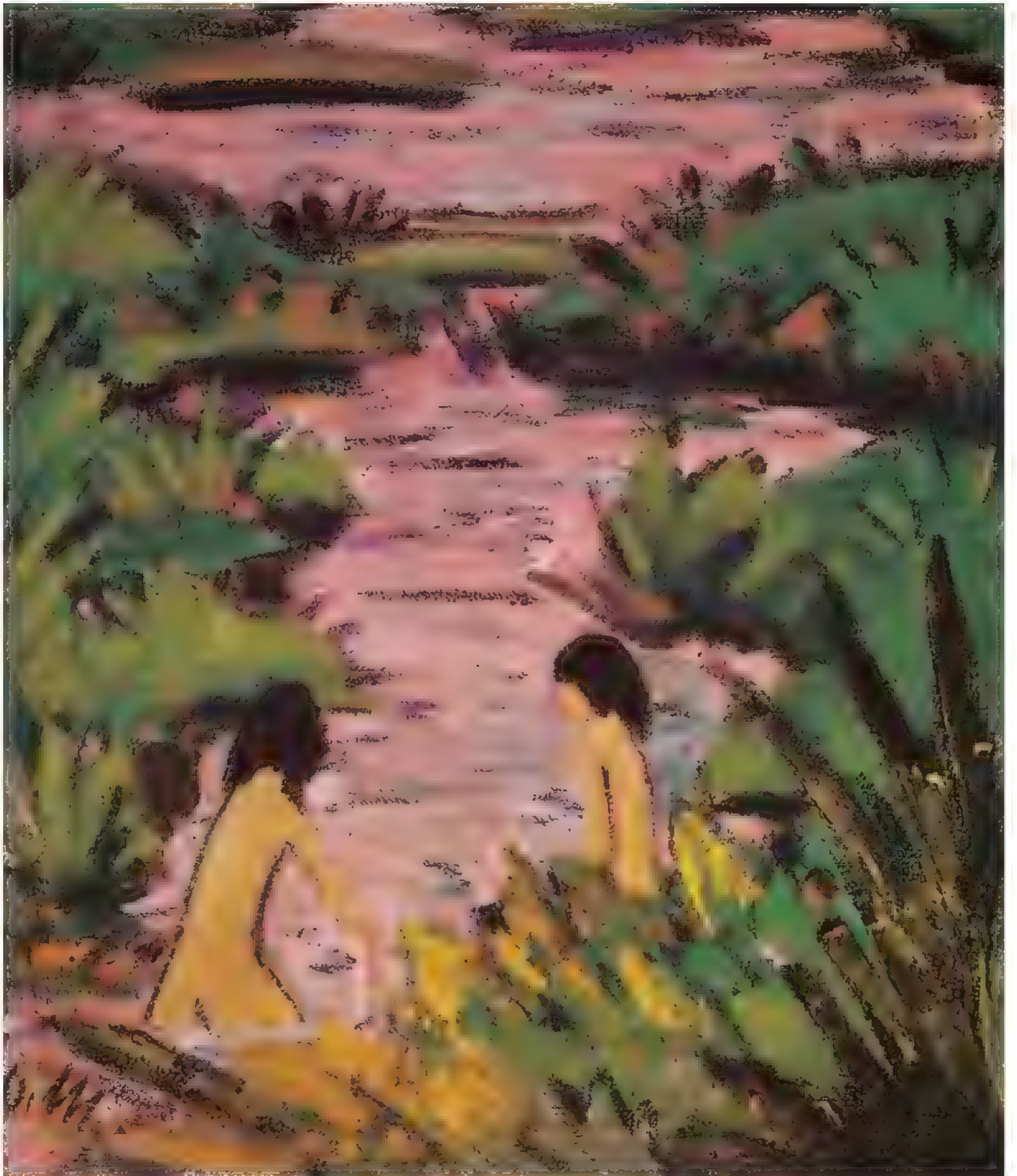
Erich Heckel,
Windmill in Dangast, 1909.
Oil on canvas, 70.5 x 80.5 cm.
Wilhelm-Lehmbruck Museum,
Duisburg.

Gabriele Münter,
Jawlensky and Wereskin, 1908–1909.
Oil on canvas, 32.7 x 44.5 cm.
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
Munich.









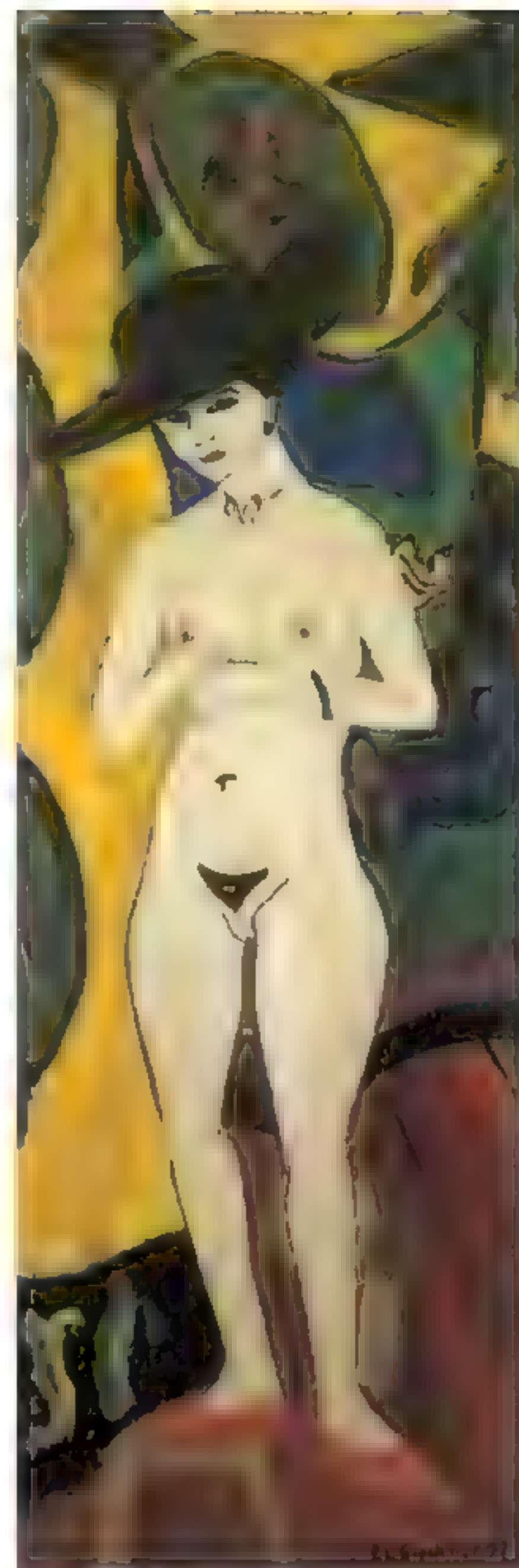
Kirchner's nude is less "posed" than Cranach's mythical beauty. But the sinuous line of Cranach's nude is echoed in Kirchner's. Both women wear fashionable, contemporary headwear and jewellery that, far from covering them, actually emphasises their nakedness. The courtly eroticism of the sixteenth century is brought up to date in the modern, bohemian context by the motifs, in the background interior of Kirchner's atelier, of primitivised copulating couples on the drapes and walls. Kirchner would have been able to study the works of Cranach at close hand in Dresden and Munich, but he first came across Cranach's *Venus* as a reproduction in the studio of his *Brücke* colleague, Otto Mueller. Later, when he saw the original on a visit to Frankfurt in about 1925, he sent a postcard to his companion, Erna "Today I saw the beautiful Venus in the original Pale pink against black"

In a letter of 1933 to his long-standing friend and supporter, Dr. Carl Hagemann, who was based in Frankfurt and to whom Kirchner was selling the painting, he urged his patron to take the opportunity to compare his canvas with Cranach's *Venus*, which hung in the city's collection. Of his own painting, Kirchner gave a description in highly subjective, personalised and sexualised terms. Here, he was effectively reiterating a recurrent Expressionist theme – the desire to break down the boundaries between art and life – when he wrote:

"[It] has almost mysterious qualities that lie in the colours and give it a variable appearance, according to the lighting. Often, it almost steps out of the frame. When I once showed it to [the painter] Scherer from Basel, who is now dead, he first thought he saw a living woman and wanted to speak to her. My wife always says I have never again achieved an image of a woman like it, and there's certainly a bit of jealousy involved with her there, since there are also some very beautiful nudes of her, such as the one you have. But perhaps she's right, in as far as the first deep love of a woman's body, which happens only once, has come into this picture"

The German Expressionist fascination with the art of the Middle Ages was translated into one practice that, it might be argued, was the movement's greatest aesthetic achievement. This was the stunning revitalisation of the woodcut medium. The woodcut printing technique, which reached its peak in the Gothic and was mastered so consummately by Durer, had long been usurped by other techniques such as engraving, etching and lithography. The *Brücke* artists discovered in the woodcut medium the ideal vehicle for a raw, expressive physicality, boldness of design and immediacy of working. In some, they introduced blocks of colour. By giving a new priority within modernism to a print medium that was often marginalised, they challenged conventional hierarchical divisions in the arts. Many other artists of the era, from Kandinsky to Kollwitz, worked extensively with the woodcut. Works like Nolde's *Prophet* of 1912 convey a strong sense of how a small, monochrome image could achieve a monumental effect, powerfully expressive of both the subject – the gaunt head of an ancient seer – and the hard wooden physicality of the hewn printing block. Evoking the messianic aspect of the *Prophet*, the critic Gustav Schiefler wrote in 1927: "Everything: beard, hair, background lines, appear in him to be reflected from an inner fire".

A tiny woodcut, branding the newly-formed "Artists Union *Brücke*" with an image not much bigger than a large postage stamp, affirms the philosophy behind the *Brücke's* name. The main image shows a bridge, at the apex of which a figure stands, arms raised to the sky or to the far shore. In the foreground, others look on. It has been interpreted as a representation





Otto Mueller,
Bathers in Reeds.

Tempera on hessian, 92 x 79 cm.
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Standing Nude with Hat, 1910-1920
Oil on canvas, 205 x 65 cm.
Städel Museum, Städtisches
Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie,
Frankfurt.

of conventional bourgeois values on our near shore, with the bridge (*Brücke*) as the transforming way across to the far shore, signifying the revitalisation of art and life. What is generally agreed is that the name *Brücke* (always used without the definite article "die") refers to a passage from the prologue to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spoke Zarathustra).

"Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman – a rope over an abyss.

"What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what can be loved in man is that he is a *going-across* [*Übergang*, also 'transition'] and a *down-going* [*Untergang*, also 'perishing'].

"I love those who do not know how to live except their lives be a down-going, for they are those who are going across.

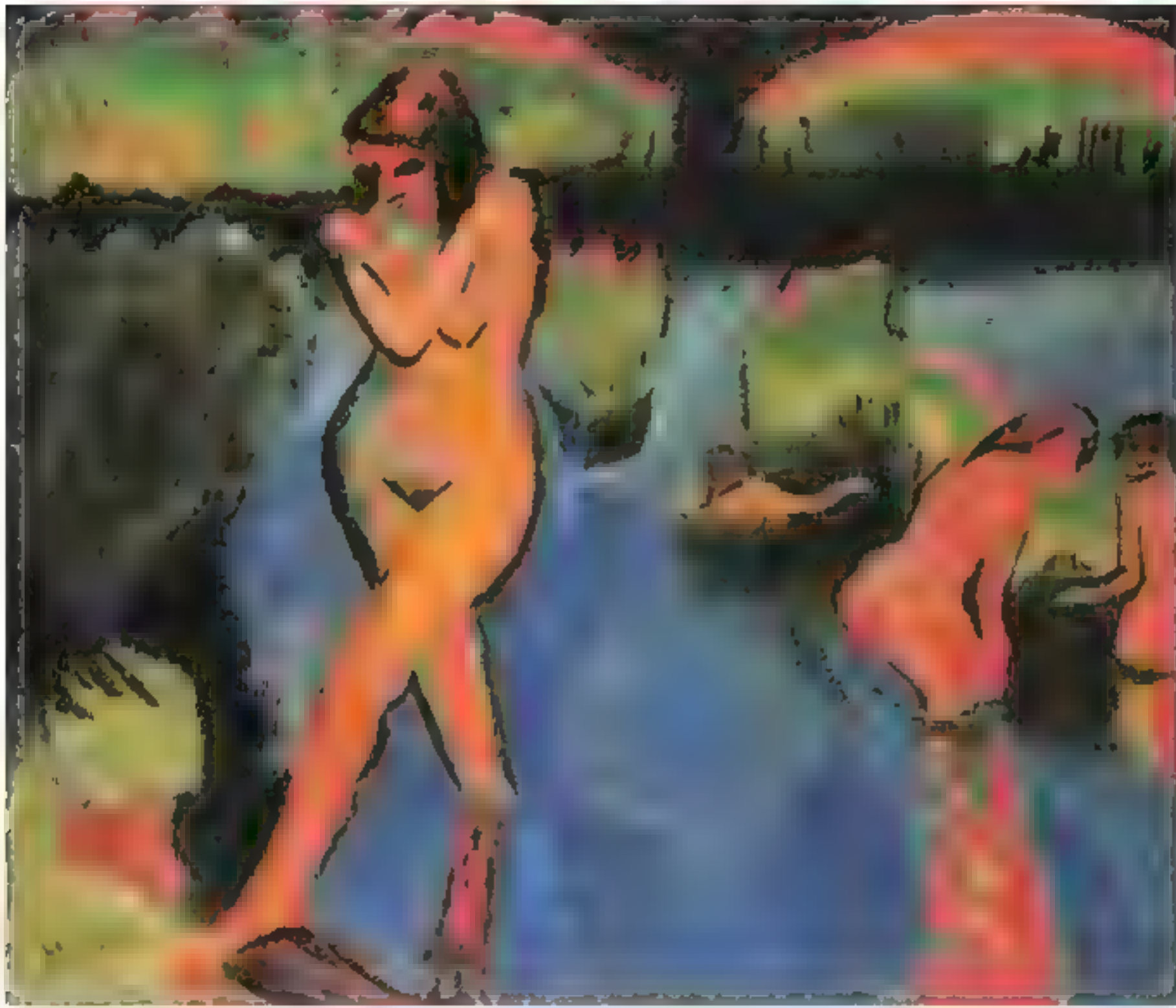
"I love the great despisers for they are the great venerators and arrows of longing for the other shore".

The central metaphor of the bridge, as the means for transformation – for the crossing to the "other bank" is reiterated a little further in the passage:

"I love him who keeps back no drop of spirit for himself, but who wants to be the spirit of his virtue entirely: thus he steps as spirit over the bridge. [...]"

"I love him whose soul is deep even in its ability to be wounded, and whom even a little thing can destroy: thus he is glad to go over the bridge".

The "arrows of longing for the other bank" appear in *Brücke* iconography in numerous images of archery, the bows and arrows often wielded by vigorous Amazonian nudes. Heckel may have been the bearer of the impulse that led to the name. Kirchner remembered:



"One day a young man declaiming loudly from *Zarathustra*, without a collar and tie, came up my steps and introduced himself as Erich Heckel".

Of all the literary and philosophical sources that were formative for the way Expressionism developed, it was Nietzsche's writings and Nietzschean ideas that exerted the most seductive appeal. It has been argued that apart from Karl Marx, no other nineteenth-century German thinker has had a greater influence on the development of German thought (and Nietzsche's works were hungrily devoured by many non-Germans too). Among the ideas that proved most alluring for artists were his diagnoses of the decadence of contemporary culture and his exaltation of *creativity* as a force pregnant with the potential for vital salvation. He championed instinct over morality. His writings proffered the idea that there were superior men of action who could rise above the crowd. His vitalism and ecstatic "Dionysian" affirmation of life, which embraced extremes of both joy and pain, fuelled Expressionism's passion, while his damning indictment of conventional morality urged on its rebellion. The Expressionist artists and poets were working at a time when the "Nietzsche cult" was at its height. Popular representations of the philosopher reached outlandish heights (literally!) such as in an image from 1915 of a muscular, heroically idealised Nietzsche atop a Zarathustran mountain range. In 1950, Gottfried Benn, who had been one of the foremost poets of the Expressionist period, reflected.

"Actually, everything that my generation discussed, dissected in its deepest thoughts – one can say suffered through; one can say: enlarged upon – all of that had been already expressed and explored, had already found its definitive formulation in Nietzsche; everything after that was exegesis. His treacherous, tempestuous, lightning manner,

August Macke,

Girls under Trees, 1914.

Oil on canvas, 119.5 x 159 cm.

Pinakothek der Moderne, Kunstareal
München, Munich.

Max Pechstein,

On the Banks of the Lake, 1910.

Oil on canvas, 70 x 80 cm.

Private collection.

his feverish diction, his rejection of all idylls and all general principles, his postulation of a psychology of instinctual behaviour as a dialectic – ‘knowledge as affect,’ all of psychoanalysis and Existentialism. They were all his achievements. As is becoming increasingly clear, he is the great giant of the post-Goethean era”.

When the young Paul Klee arrived in Munich in 1899, he noted in his diary “Nietzsche in the air. Glorification of the self and the instincts. Boundless sexual drives”.

Munich was the other major site of pre-war Expressionism’s flourishing. There, in the old capital of German *art nouveau* or *Jugendstil*, other shifting constellations of artists were working, exhibiting and exchanging ideas together in the rich cultural environment of the city, or to be precise, its famous bohemian artists’ quarter, Schwabing. Wassily Kandinsky gave a vivid picture of the district’s pre-war milieu: “The rather odd, quite eccentric and self-assured Schwabing, in whose streets anyone – be they a man or a woman ... immediately stood out if they were without a palette, or a canvas, or at least without a portfolio. ... Everyone painted ... or wrote poetry, or made music, or began to dance. You could find at least two ateliers under the roof in every house, where sometimes not exactly very much was painted, but a lot was always debated, disputed, philosophised and conscientiously drunk (which depended more on the state of one’s purse than on the state of one’s morals)”.

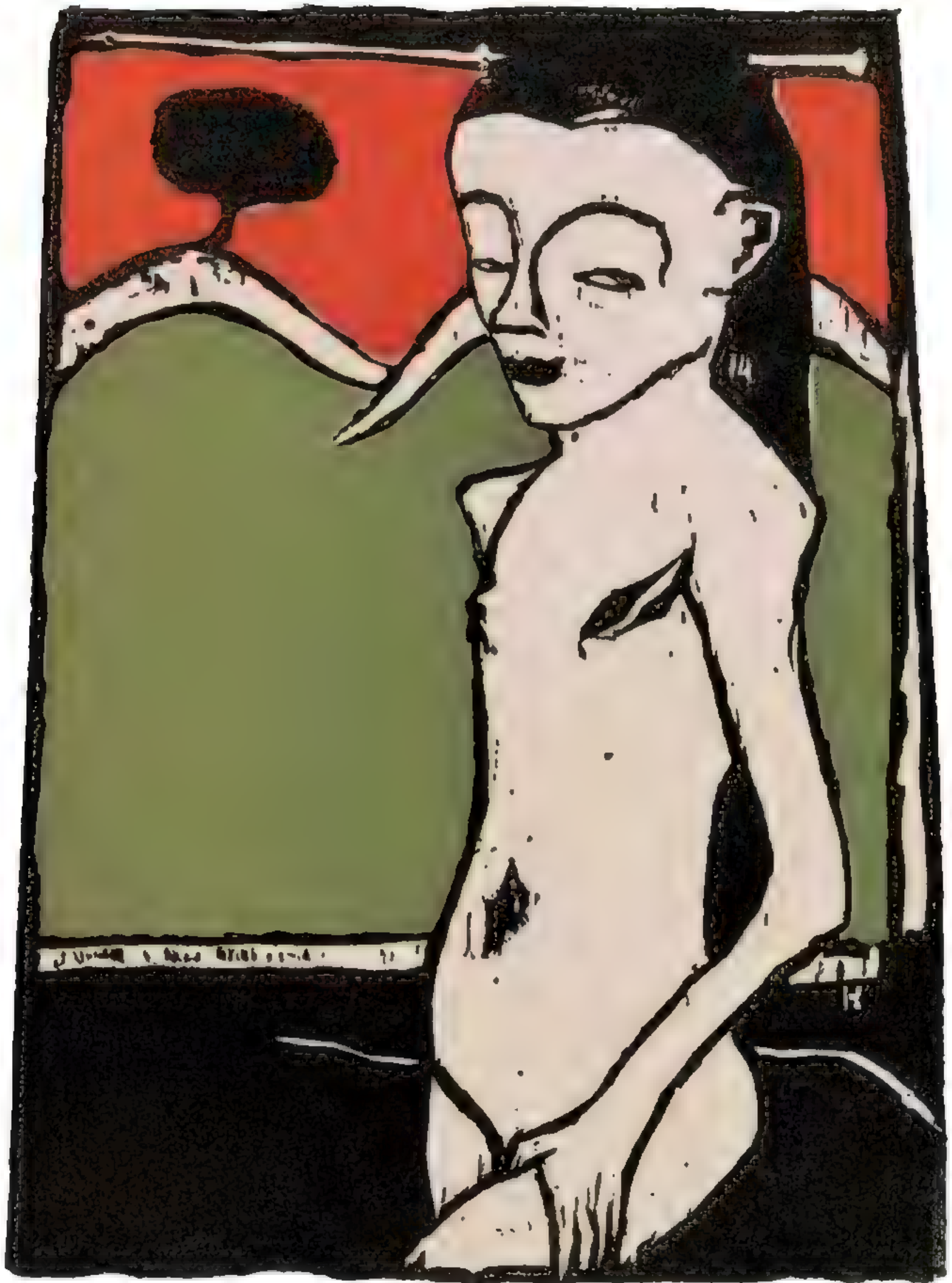
Kandinsky tells a story, probably well-worn, that is revealing not only of Munich’s artists’ quarter, but of a whole dimension of the bohemian creed of “living” art. “What is Schwabing?” asks a Berliner visiting Munich “It’s the northern district of the city” the local replies. “No way”, says another, “it’s a mental state”.

There were many Russians, like Alexander Sakharov, captured in an extraordinary portrait by his friend Alexei von Jawlensky (p.34). The dancer visited the painter one evening before a performance, already made up and in costume, which created a particularly androgynous effect. Quickly and spontaneously – reportedly in less than half an hour – Jawlensky produced this free, vigorous and highly memorable image.

At thirty, Kandinsky was a Russian who found himself in this milieu after leaving a promising career as an academic lawyer in Moscow. He headed for the artistic life in Munich in 1896, and quickly graduated from art student with the painter Franz von Stuck, to an important figure in the Munich avant-garde. He was a co-founder and president of the “Phalanx” school and exhibiting group (1901-1904) and of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* (New Artists’ Association of Munich) or NKVM in 1909. Through these activities he established a reputation as an effective organiser, and worked and exhibited together with many other Russian émigrés and German artists, including Gabriele Münter, who became his companion for the duration of his most formative years.

Stylistically, Kandinsky and his colleagues began to push the boundaries of their painting in the late summer of 1908. Four of them – Kandinsky, Münter, Jawlensky and Marianne von Werefkin – made a painting trip to the village of Murnau in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps. The following summer, Münter bought a house there. It soon became known as the “Russian House” and provided the base from which the couple and their artist friends painted Murnau and its surroundings in a series of colourful, ever more innovative canvases.

Erich Heckel,
Standing Child, 1911.
Colour woodcut, 37.5 x 27.7 cm.
Museum Folkwang, Essen





Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) originated in a project conceived by Kandinsky and a younger colleague, Franz Marc, in 1911. They shared the desire to publish a new kind of periodical.

Before it was published, they staged a rather hastily-assembled group exhibition, the “1. Ausstellung der Redaktion des Blauen Reiter” (1st Exhibition of the Editors of the Blue Rider) at Munich’s Thannhauser gallery (December 1911 – January 1912). It was a motley mix of works by Henri Rousseau, Kandinsky, August Macke, Marc, Münter, the composer Arnold Schoenberg and Robert Delaunay among others. It went on to Berlin, where Herwarth Walden added works by Klee, Kubin, Jawlensky and Werefkin, before showing it as the first *Sturm* exhibition. A second *Blaue Reiter* exhibition, of international graphic works – including Picasso and the Russian Malevich – was staged almost immediately, in March and April 1912, at Hans Goltz’s gallery.

Of the planned periodical, only one issue appeared, in 1912, but it is arguably the most important single document of pre-war Expressionism: the *Blaue Reiter Almanac*. On one level it is a kind of sourcebook for artists of texts and images. However, taken as a whole, it can be read as an entire argument for a radical revision of art and how we look at it. Looking back, writing in 1930, Kandinsky described the motivation behind the *Blaue Reiter* project:

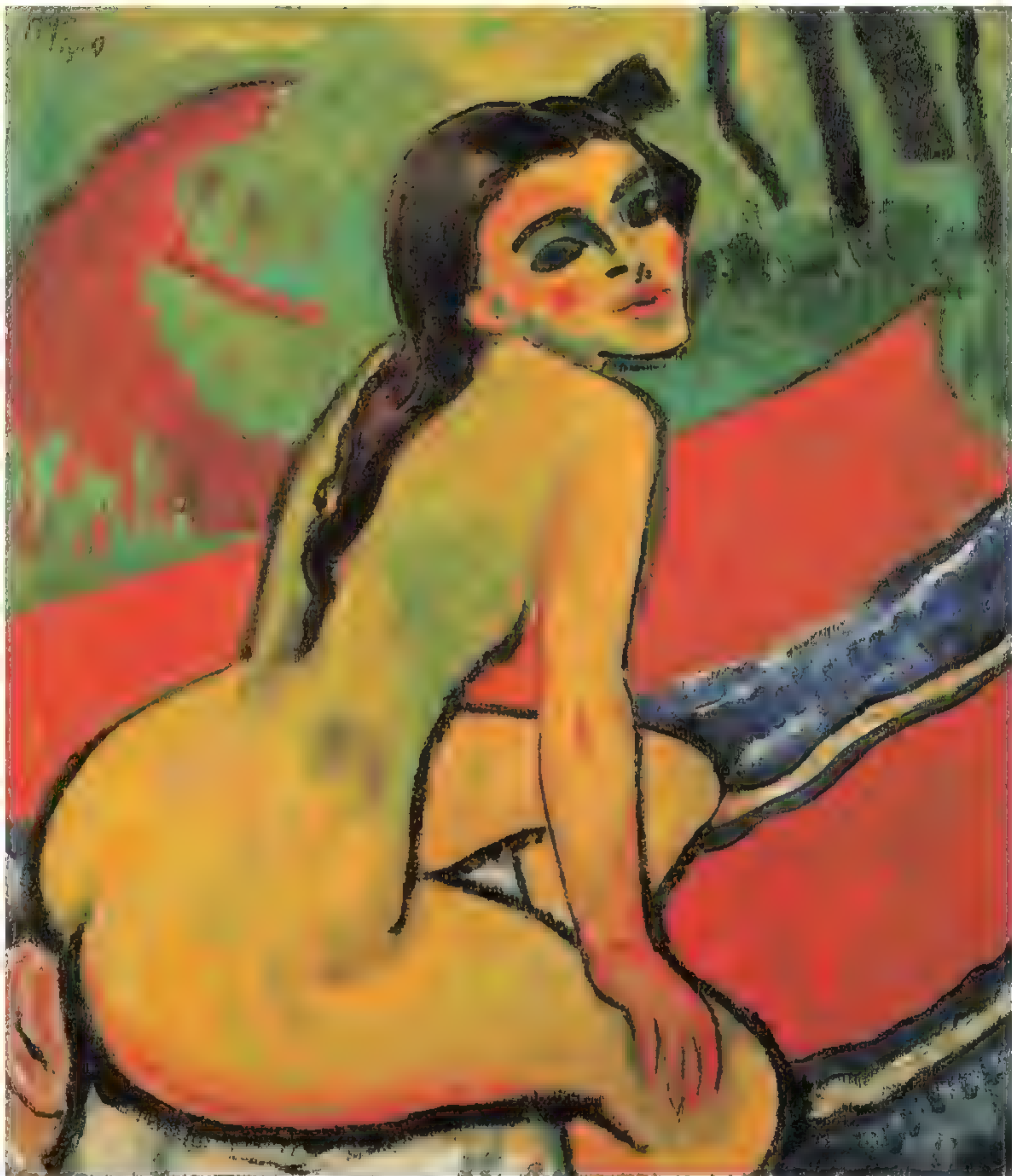
“It was at that time that my wish matured to assemble a book (a kind of almanac) in which artists would be the only authors. I dreamt primarily of painters and musicians. The ruinous separation of the arts from one another and, furthermore, of ‘Art’ from folk art and children’s art, from ‘Ethnography,’ the solid walls between phenomena that were, in my eyes, so closely related, often even identical: in a word the synthesis left me no peace”.

The almanac contains reproductions of paintings and graphic works by artists from El Greco to Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso, the *Donaufer* Rousseau, the *Brücke* colleagues Kirchner and Heckel, the *Blaue Reiter* artists and others are juxtaposed with objects and images from Latin America, Alaska, Japan and Africa. There are medieval woodcuts, carvings and tapestries, Bavarian glass paintings, Egyptian shadow figures and children’s drawings. Even leaving aside the texts and music scores in the almanac, the volume is like a cabinet of curiosities, a trove of images combined in ways that are suggestive of unexpected relationships.

The name *Der Blaue Reiter* is related to a recurrent motif in Kandinsky’s paintings from his Munich period; a rider on horseback (p.22). A mounted rider also appears with striking frequency among the objects and images reproduced in the almanac. The colour blue was cherished by both Kandinsky and Marc, who believed that it had a particularly “spiritual” quality.

The artists who were associated with the *Blaue Reiter* name in 1911 and 1912 by inclusion in their exhibitions and almanac, were numerous. Today, the term is usually used to refer to a smaller group, chiefly Kandinsky, Marc, Münter, Jawlensky, Werefkin, Klee and Macke. These last two enjoyed a particularly creative friendship for a short time before the war, travelling to Tunisia together. The *Blaue Reiter* circle included some very close friends, but they were less a “group” than the *Brücke* had been in 1910, for example. Their styles, subjects and theoretical concerns were much more diverse. They did not always agree on fundamental issues – particularly around the nature and role of the “spiritual” in art, yet this milieu proved one of the most fertile of the pre-war Expressionist era.

Alexej von Jawlensky,
*Portrait of the Dancer Alexander
Sakharov*, 1909
Oil on cardboard, 69.5 x 66.5 cm.
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
Munich



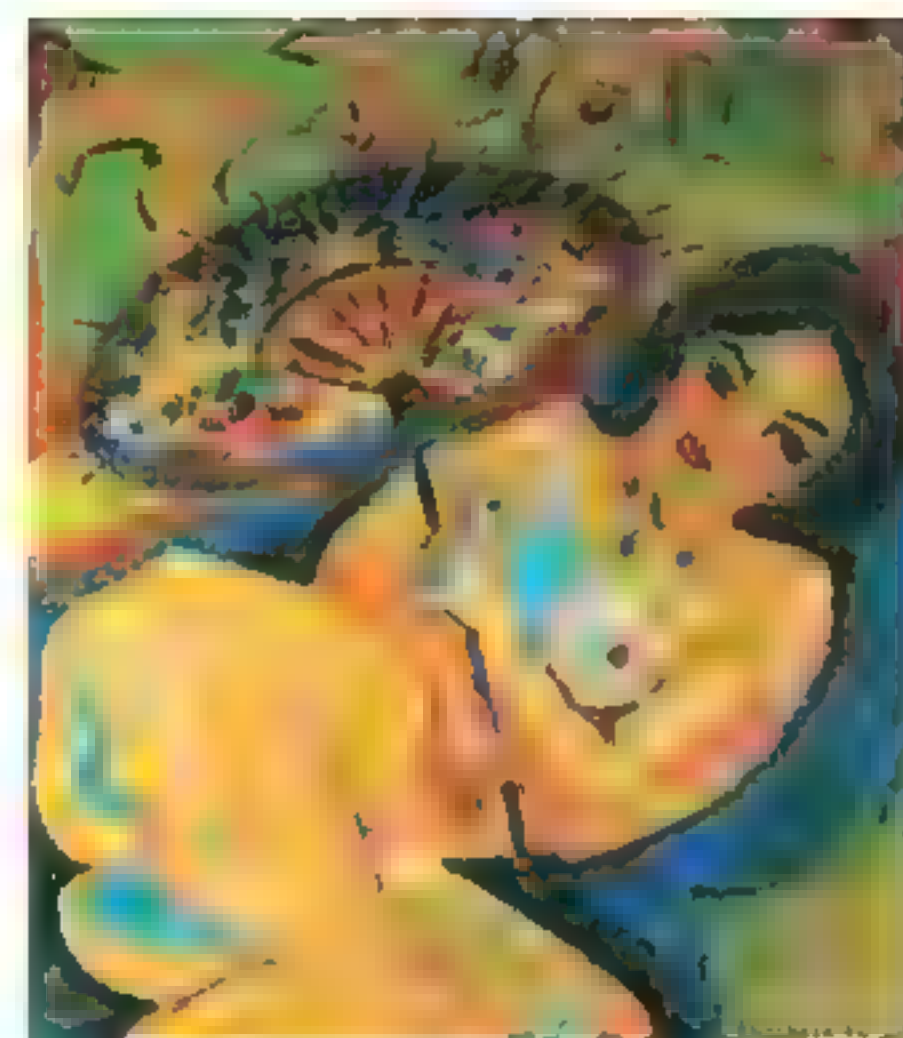
THE BODY AND NATURE

This chapter examines the central importance, in many Expressionist works, of the relationship between man / woman and nature. The nude played a pivotal role in the *Brücke's* practice, where it was often an idealised symbol of moral, physical and sexual liberation. The body and sexuality was differently cast in other Expressionist contexts, as further chapters will explore.

Expressionism is often subject to cliché and misunderstanding. It has sometimes been dismissed as an aberrant detour in the onwards march of European modernism. The influential American critic Clement Greenberg felt, for example, that Kandinsky's work suffered as a result of the context from which it emerged: "Picasso's good luck was to have come to French modernism directly, without the intervention of any other kind of modernism. It was perhaps Kandinsky's bad luck to have had to go through German modernism first". At other times Expressionism has been over-dramatised as an irrational manifestation of a peculiarly Teutonic neurosis. More accurately, it has been described in terms of a "cultivated rebellion". In order to understand the many forms Expressionism took in Dresden, Berlin, Munich, Vienna and numerous provincial outposts, it is useful to grasp what it was rebelling *against*.

In common with much of Western Europe, Wilhelmine Germany in the late nineteenth-century was in a state of massive upheaval. The rampant effects of modern capitalism – industrialisation, urbanisation, rationalisation and secularisation – created ruptures in the social fabric that were not easily absorbed or contained. In spite of this, the process of Germany's economic modernisation, supervised by an absolutist military state, was carried out with precision and discipline – even though these were qualities sometimes lacking in the monarch himself. Traditional morality both relied upon and fed orderliness and the power of institutions: above all, the monarchy, the church, the family, school and the army. Paul Klee, a Swiss, satirised with cruel precision a particularly Prussian "virtue" – unquestioning obedience to authority – in an early etching. It shows a grotesquely fawning monarchist, ludicrous in his nakedness, bowing down so low before an apparition of a crown that he appears on the verge of toppling into the abyss.

Expressionism was a self-consciously *youthful* movement. The "Founding Manifesto of the *Brücke*" (quoted in the previous chapter) proclaims it clearly. It bears witness to the generation gap, which had widened to a gulf. In their age, the primary influence on young people was no longer parental, but increasingly, social. The programme very clearly identifies "a new generation of creators" and "youth", striving for "freedom of life", as a group quite distinct from the "long-established older forces". Significantly, Kirchner's call to youth was not unique. At this time, many young Germans were discovering group identities for themselves. After the turn of the century, numerous youth groups formed,



Max Pechstein,

Seated Girl, 1910

Oil on canvas, 80 x 70 cm.

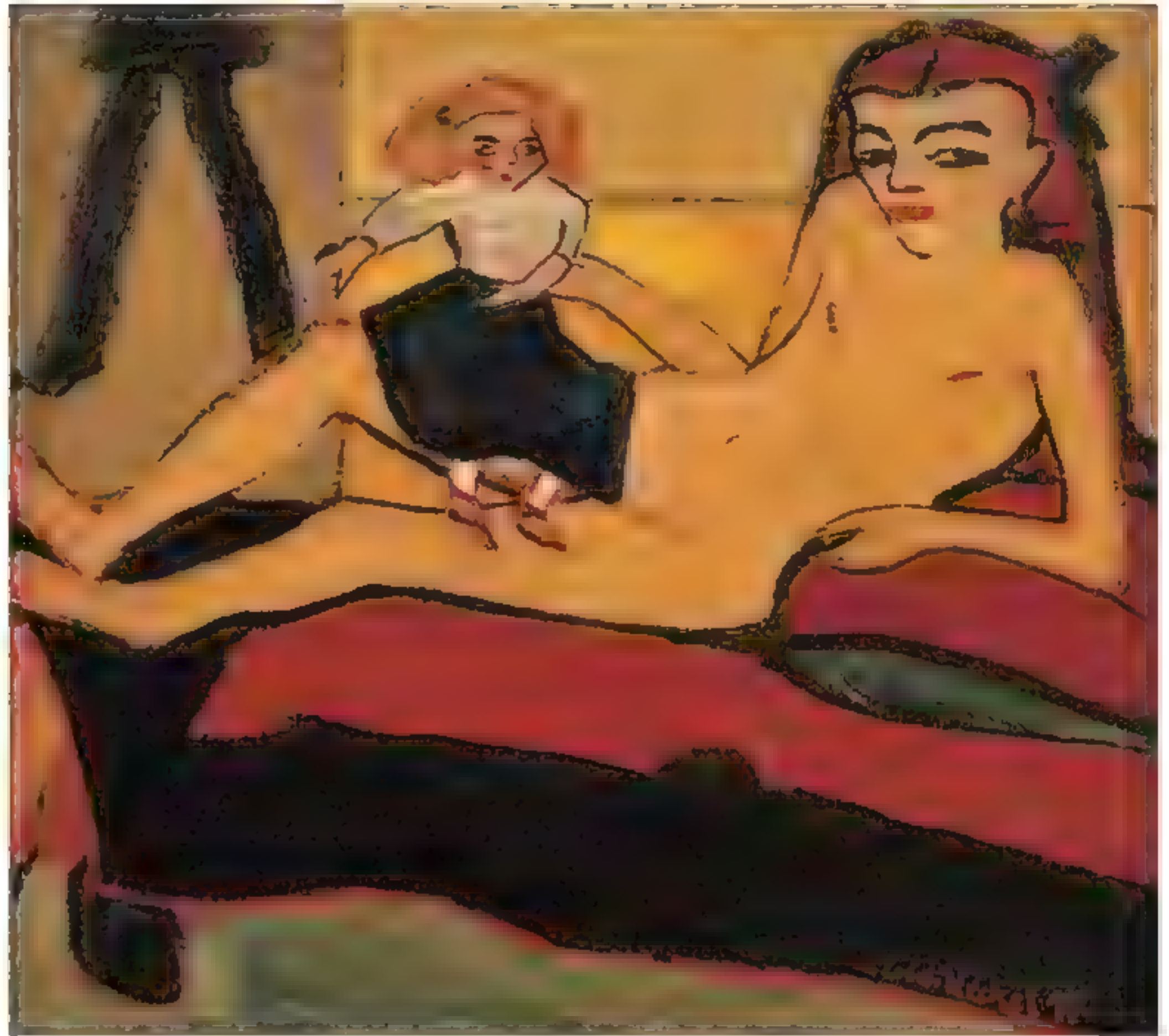
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,

Girl under a Japanese Parasol, 1909.

Oil on canvas, 92 x 80 cm.

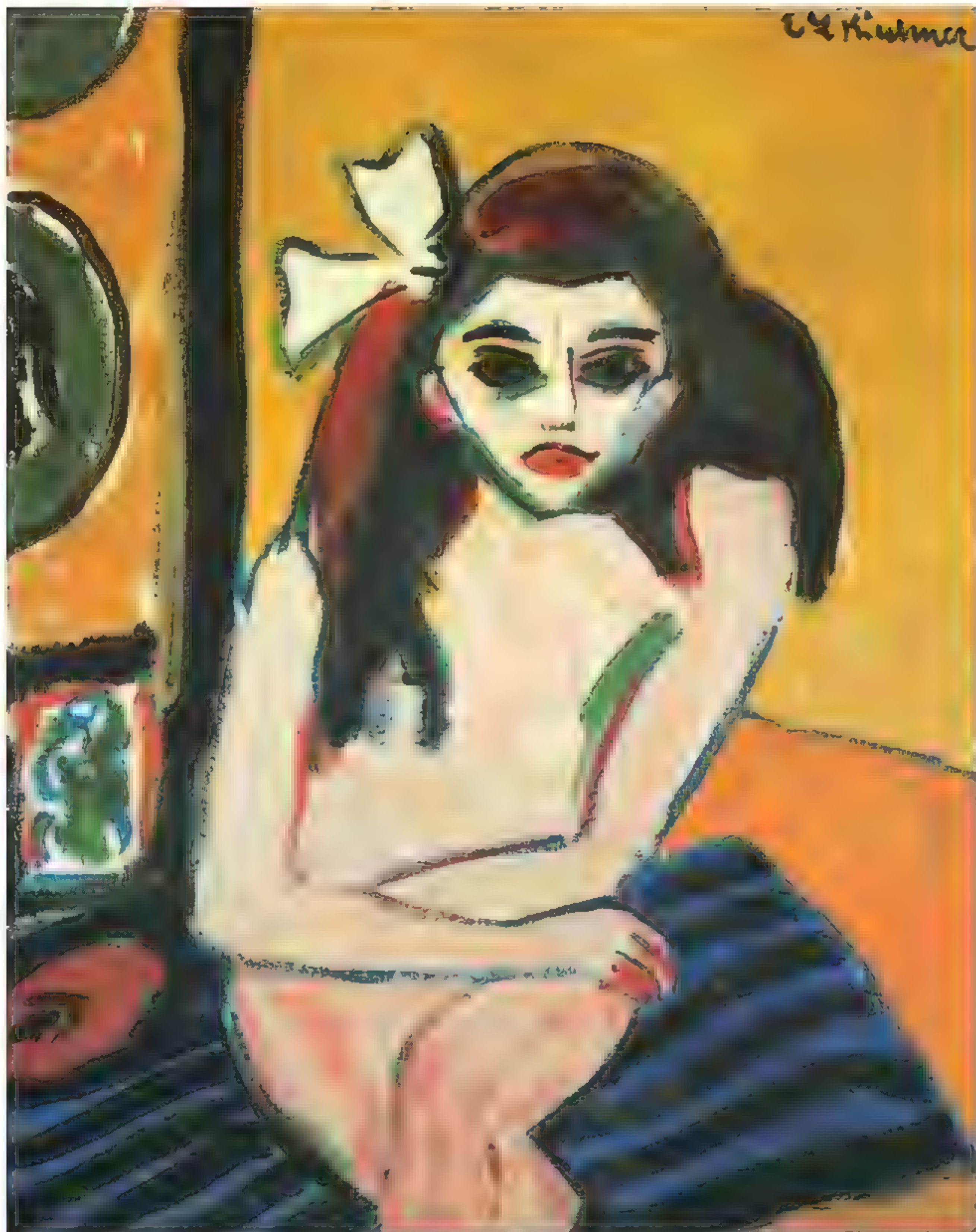
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,
Dusseldorf.

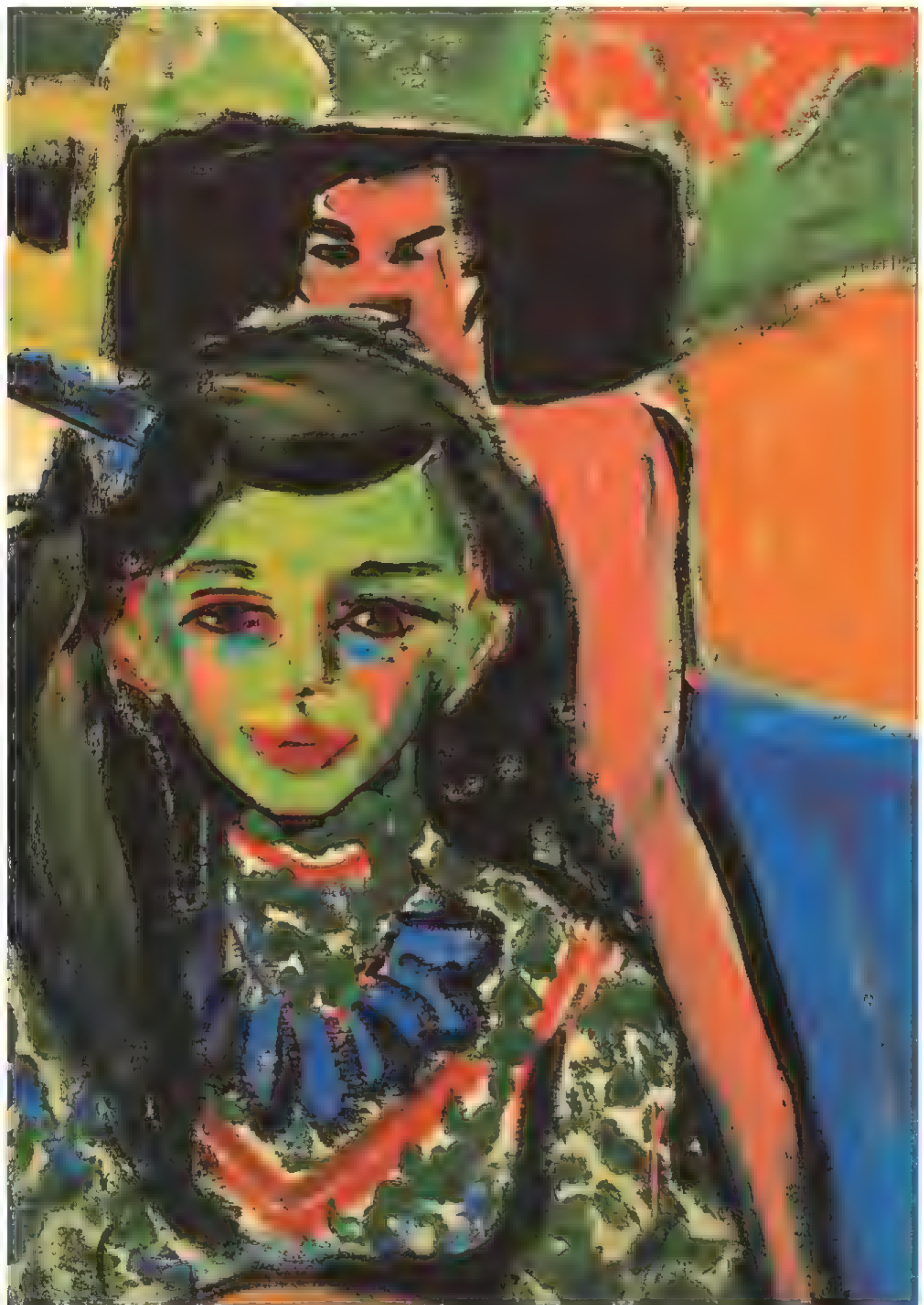


Erich Heckel,
Girl with Doll (Fränzi), 1910
 Oil on canvas, 65 x 70 cm
 Private collection.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Marzella, 1909-1910
 Oil on canvas, 76 x 60 cm
 Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

the largest of which became the *Handarvogel* movement. Immersion in the German countryside as an antidote to the city was not just a recuperative measure. It was a whole ideology. This encompassed urban workers' associations seeking alleviation from city drudgery by means of invigorating country hikes, student organisations, Christian and Jewish groups, communities inspired by German paganism, ultra-nationalists as well as socialist pacifists, anarchists, vegetarians, those interested in Eastern philosophies, and all manner of others seeking reforming lifestyles. Britain's Arts and Crafts movement was a direct expression of the desire for a return to pre-industrial values, so it is not surprising that John Ruskin and William Morris were among the prophets often upheld by these groups. *Jugendstil*, iconographically and stylistically "youthful", organic and anti-materialist, was often the nearest visual metaphor for this ethos. In a large, highly stylised canvas by the eminent Swiss painter, Ferdinand Hodler (whose distinctive "parallelism" is also related to *Jugendstil*), the abstract concept of "truth" is given allegorical form in the figure of a gleaming female nude, whose light dazzles the draped male figures around her. The widespread *Freikörperkultur*, naturism, or "Free Body Culture" movement, originated in this context. Most of these were middle-class





movements, but they shared a desire to establish a principled independence from the crass materialism of modern life

The foundation of groups such as the *Brücke* can be seen as part of this predominantly youthful German movement. They “belonged” to a new age that was not their parents’. This helps to account for their rejection of the public moral and spiritual values of the older generation. It also sheds light on other Expressionists’ imagery of youth. There is more than a whiff of Nietzsche around Wilhelm Lehmbruck’s young, contemplative, *ascending* youth, for example. Its articulation of both the inwardness and the aspirational vitalism of the generation moved many who saw it.

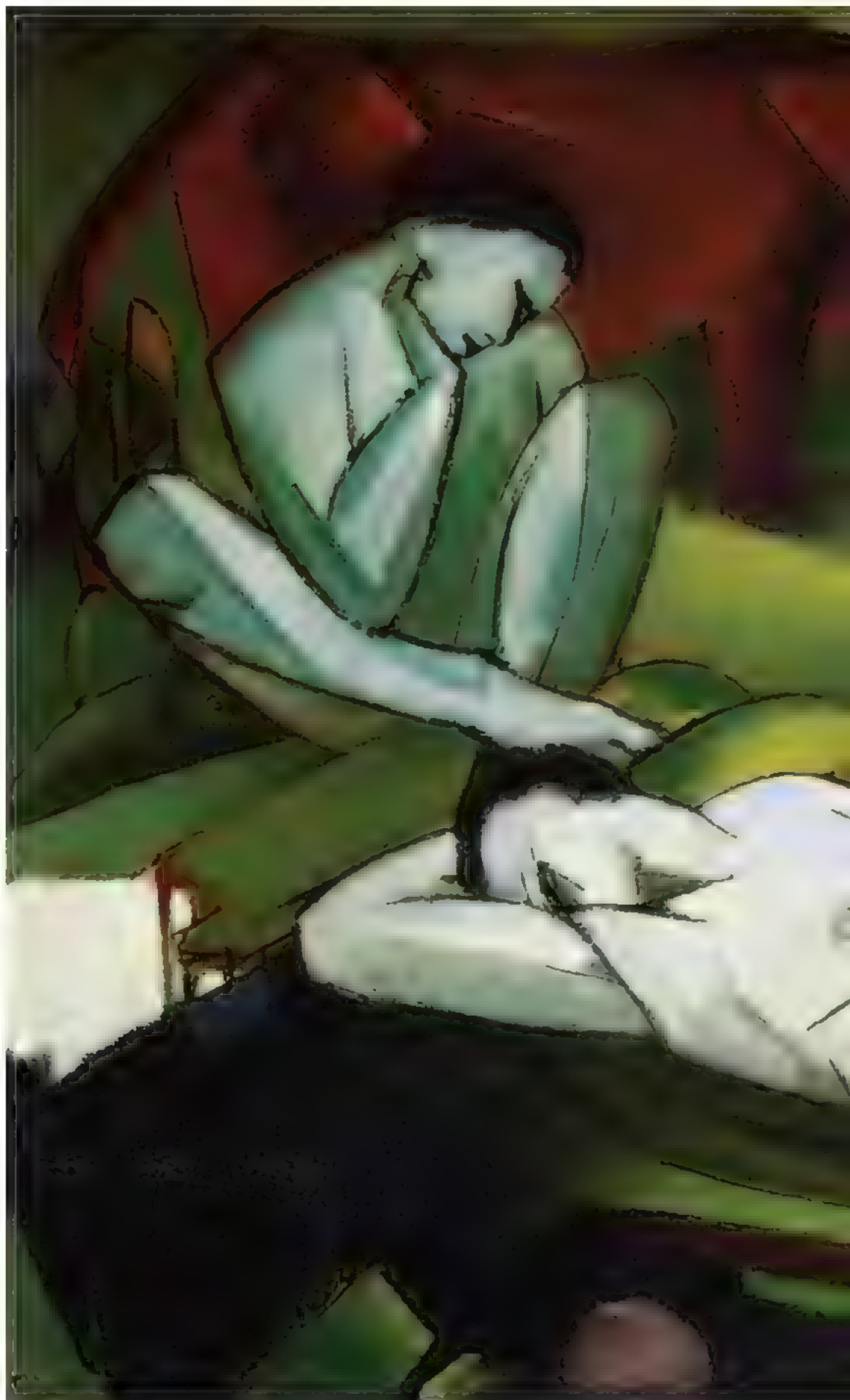
It was particularly through representations of the body, sexuality, and nature that many Expressionists enacted both their resistance to bourgeois culture and their accompanying search for rejuvenated creativity. In this context, the naked frolics of the *Brücke* artists and models on their summer excursions to the Moritzburg lakes north of Dresden are not the lunatic forays of decadent bohemians, but are also related to existing contemporary trends. They went there in the summers of 1909, 1910 and 1911. Max Pechstein gave an idyllic description, recalling the spirit of their trip in 1910, when he, Kirchner and Heckel were accompanied by friends and models: “We lived in absolute harmony; we worked and we swam. If a male model was needed ... one of us would jump into the breach”. The communal harmony was entirely in keeping with the utopian spirit of *Gemeinschaft*, or “community”.

On the 1910 trip to Moritzburg, Kirchner painted his *Nudes Playing Under a Tree*. This and other works, such as a woodcut showing a group of nudes playing with reeds, show evidence of Kirchner’s interest in a set of carved and painted wooden beams that he had recently sketched in the Dresden Ethnographic Museum. These carvings, from a men’s club in the Micronesian Palau Islands, depicted scenes of daily life and erotic mythology, such as a story of a native with a giant penis who was capable of penetrating his wife on another island. Pechstein was so enamoured with his fantasy of life in the South Seas that, like Gauguin before him, he actually travelled to the Palau Islands in 1914. Kirchner’s “primitivism” too is not purely stylistic; it also involves an eroticism that is deliberately unsophisticated, “instinctive” and implicitly primeval. This would have been at odds with even the more liberated of the conservative nature-worshippers. The “primitivism” aspired to by the *Wandervogel* and free body cultists was essentially either pan-German medievalism or “healthy” asexual aestheticism, not liberated sexuality. The embracing couple in Kirchner’s painting alone goes against the terms of conservative German naturism, which had a strong emphasis on health and often prescribed gender-segregated areas for its patrons. Thus, while the *Brücke* joined their fellow Germans in their escapes to the country, their physical and aesthetic response to nature had very little to do with intellectualised therapy or sentimental nationalism.

Back in the city, the *Brücke* studios in Dresden were communal, social environments for creativity and liberated nudity. A later photograph of a friend, Hugo Biallowons, dancing naked across Kirchner’s Berlin studio, although taken after the *Brücke* had disbanded, conveys something of this ambience. These were other “alternative” spaces,

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Fräuzi in Front of Carved Chair, 1910.
Oil on canvas, 71 x 49.5 cm.
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

Franz Marc,
Shepherds, 1912
Oil on canvas, 100 x 135 cm
Pinakothek der Moderne Kunstareal
Munich, Munich.





outside the norms of public life. The *Brücke's* work, lifestyle and interiors are all redolent of a reaction against "civilised" sophistication and "civilised" sexual etiquette. The rough-hewn wood sculptures and woodcuts they made were part of the search for a "direct" way of working. It is also no coincidence that Kirchner painted his human subjects with pseudo-African carvings, exotic accessories or against backdrops of the murals and wall-hangings with "primitive" motifs of lovers that decorated their Dresden studios.

Late in 1909, Kirchner and Heckel began using two young girls, Franzi and Marzella, aged somewhere between ten and fifteen, as models for numerous paintings and graphic works (pp.38–40). They came from the local working-class district of Friedrichstadt. In the *Brücke* works, they sometimes appear in outdoor settings – they accompanied the artists to the lakes in 1910 – but usually they are in the studio, often nude and shown with dolls, animals or "primitive" carvings. Adolescent subjects had provided powerful and controversial material in Germany already. Frank Wedekind's play, *Frühlingserwachen* (Spring's Awakening), written in 1890–91, focused on the tragic fate of three adolescents for whom the onset of puberty awakens feelings and emotions that throw them into direct conflict with the strictures of bourgeois morality. Breaking several taboos at once (homosexuality, suicide and abortion among them), it was banned in Germany for several years. But by the time the *Brücke* were working, it had been successfully staged many times and was enjoying great popularity. It provided a blueprint for a whole genre of Expressionist literature revolving around generational conflict, which also included a wider "revolt of the sons against the fathers", as it came to be known. In Vienna, Oskar Kokoschka produced a book of prints and poems called *Die traumenden Knaben* (The Dreaming Boys) at the beginning of his career in 1908. It, too, draws upon adolescence as a liminal state of heightened sensitivity, conflict and unresolved yearnings.

With the obvious exception of the work of Egon Schiele in Vienna, it is rare to find painted images of adolescents with such psychological presence. The *Brücke* works do not represent them merely as undeveloped versions of adults, nor are they sentimentalised. Instead, they have a disconcerting character stemming from the mixture of childhood innocence on the one hand and a developing self-awareness on the other. *Brücke* bohemianism negated the conventional "shame" of the body and nakedness, but did not replace it with a corresponding "innocence". In Kirchner's 1910 portrait of *Franzi in front of a Carved Chair* (p.40), she stares out at us with a mask-like face. Her form is echoed in the roughly-hewn anthropomorphic chair, which can be seen more clearly in a related pastel drawing. The chair was one of the earliest pieces of *Brücke* furniture, inspired by Cameroon sources, carved by Kirchner out of limewood planks and painted pink and black. The acid, artificial colours of Franzi's face, suggestive of inexpertly daubed make-up, leave room for some ambiguity between playfulness and knowing sophistication. They also contrast ironically with the "flesh" tones of the rough, inanimate chair in a conscious play on nature and artifice. With this slippage, Kirchner implicitly allies the young adolescent with "the primitive".

In the autumn of 1911, the *Brücke* artists left the serene, Baroque city of Dresden and moved to Berlin; the bursting, industrial metropolis. The artists began to grow apart

Erich Heckel,

Day of Glass, 1913.

Oil on canvas, 138 x 114 cm.

Pinakothek der Moderne, Kunstareal
München, Munich





They quarrelled. It seems the final straw was Kirchner's egocentric account of the *Brücke* in his *Chronik der Brücke* (Chronicle of the *Brücke*) published in 1913. The group's split was rancorous, far from the spirit of their idyllic summer sorties in the past. But the artists' search for the longed-for synthesis of man and nature continued during the Berlin years. In 1912, Kirchner sought out a more remote location – returning to a place he knew, the island of Fehmarn, in the Baltic off the Holstein coast. Under the influence of Ajanta wall-paintings, he explored a new sculptural dimension to his painting. The work he did on Fehmarn was decisive for his development. As he put it, "This was where I learned to give form to the ultimate unity of man and nature and completed what I had begun in Moritzburg. The colours became milder and richer, the form stricter".

Striding into the Sea is a positive image of man in dynamic harmony with nature. The sea has baptismal connotations of rejuvenation, cleansing and rebirth. The monumental, even heroic figures step easily and fearlessly over the waves. The bather lying on the beach seems rooted in the shore, like the rocks. The figures here are more purposeful, less playful than in the Moritzburg pictures. The Fehmarn scene is "idyllic", but in a more profound, utopian sense: it is not a hedonist's idyll, but articulates a higher, spiritual "unity of man and nature". Kirchner endowed his bold, universal men and women with serene vitality – those qualities so quickly sapped in the enervating city. In keeping with Expressionism's growing maturity, the oceanic recuperation monumentalised in paintings such as this can be seen to have fulfilled a more existential need than did the playful excursions to Moritzburg.

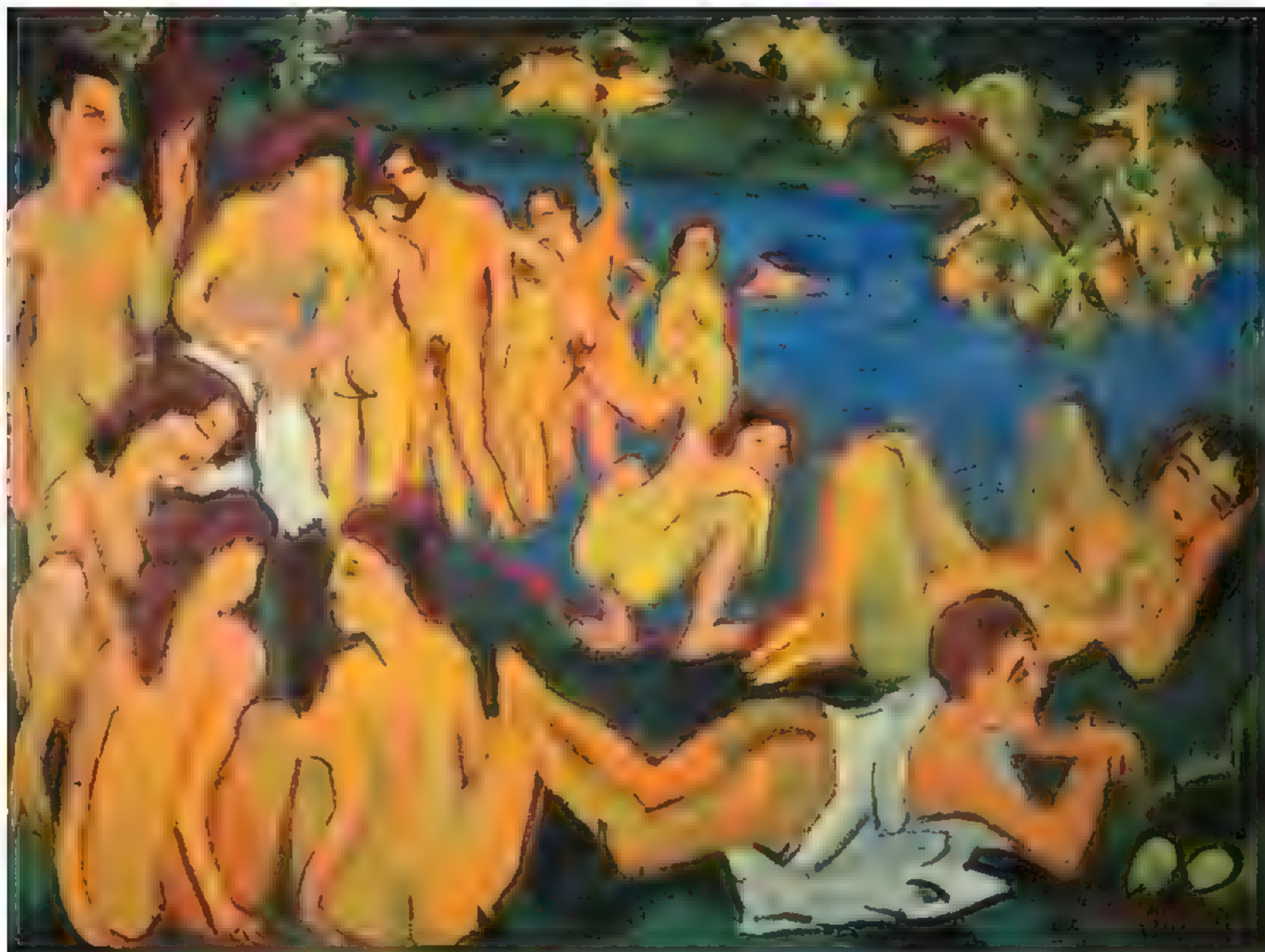
Karl Schmidt-Rottluff,
Summer, 1913
Oil on canvas, 88 x 104 cm
Sprengel Museum, Hannover



At the end of his life, Kirchner wrote that the American poet Walt Whitman had been responsible for his outlook on life. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was translated into German in 1907 and created a sensation. It became a celebrated and vital source for a whole generation of Expressionist painters and poets. The ideal of guiltless, unfettered sexuality and sexual equality found in groups like the *Brücke* was confirmed by their reading of Whitman. Later, Kirchner described how in times of suffering and hunger in Dresden and after, *Leaves of Grass* was an abiding source of encouragement. A passage from "Song of Myself" in *Leaves of Grass* is interesting to consider in relation to *Man and Woman Striding into the Sea*. Whitman submits himself, naked, to the sea as if it were a lover. In so doing, he expresses ecstatically the longed-for fusion with nature itself that became so central to Expressionist thinking:

You sea! I resign myself to you also ... I guess what you mean,
 I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers,
 I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of me;
 We must have a turn together ... I undress ... hurry me out of sight of the land,
 Cushion me soft ... rock me in billowy drowse,
 Dash me with amorous wet ... I can repay you.
 Sea of stretched ground-swells!
 Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths!
 Sea of the brine of life! Sea of unshovelled and always-ready graves!
 Howler and scooper of storms! Capricious and dainty sea!
 I am integral with you ... I too am of one phase and of all phases.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
*Man and Woman Striding
 into the Sea*, 1912.
 Oil on canvas, 146 x 200 cm.
 Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart.



Indeed, it is noticeable that in many *Brücke* pictures of this period, men and women are often physically wedged between rocks, into the nooks of tree branches, between the rolling sea's waves or sprawled on the sand – literally embedded in nature. In a painting made the following summer by Schmidt-Rottluff, the simplified forms, the red of the figures and the dunes as well as the lack of horizon all amplify a comparable sense of archaic synthesis between human beings and nature.

It is also interesting to compare, in this respect, the work of Franz Marc. A key member of the *Blaue Reiter* circle, and thus engaged in different debates around art, Marc was a painter with an intensely sensitive affinity with nature. However, his response to nature is *not* mediated by man's presence in it or by the vitality of the natural body, such as we see in the *Brücke* works. His work is overwhelmingly concerned with the landscape, the animal kingdom and natural phenomena. There is only an occasional human presence in these landscapes.

Furthermore, his humans, unlike his animals, are strangely ephemeral and undifferentiated. Even when they are physically active – for example, carrying felled timber or bathing in a waterfall – they are oddly passive. They even have a somnambulist quality. Their gaze is downcast, their eyes closed. They neither luxuriate in, nor animate the landscape. In Marc's work, men and women are either incidental or have no place at all in a world that belongs to his complex, sentient animals. In his *Shepherds* of around 1911, a telling role reversal has taken place, while the shepherds doze, naked, placid and vulnerable, the horse and cow seem to stand guard and keep watch, quietly alert (pp.42-43).

The *Brücke's* Rousseauian longings were, indeed, only a part of the wider Expressionist movement's fascination and engagement with the human form. For all its sexual democracy, belief in ideal equality between the sexes, and rejection of the conventional artist-model relationship, the *Brücke* nonetheless consisted of male artists focusing primarily (though not exclusively) on the female nude.

Furthermore, almost all of their human subjects (in the period prior to the 1913 split) are young, attractive and healthy. In line with their bohemian aspirations, they celebrated "marginal" figures, from adolescents to circus performers and prostitutes, but in this period, their embrace only rarely extended to older subjects, the infirm, the sick or the unexotic. In general, it was elsewhere and later that more nuanced variations on the body could be found within Expressionism.

Ultimately, the Great War and its shattering effects on European civilisation as well as on individual bodies was what rendered early Expressionism's vital exuberance and fantasies of wholeness no longer tenable. Later chapters will examine these effects in further detail.

There is, within Expressionism, another, very different dramatisation of the body. Appropriately, it is to Vienna, city of Freud and psychoanalysis that we look. From here emerged some of the most dramatic, controversial and unflinching Expressionist representations of the body, its sensations and the inner psychic life of human beings. This is the subject of the next chapter.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Bathers at Moritzburg, 1909-1926.
Oil on canvas, 151.1 x 199.7 cm
Tate Modern, London

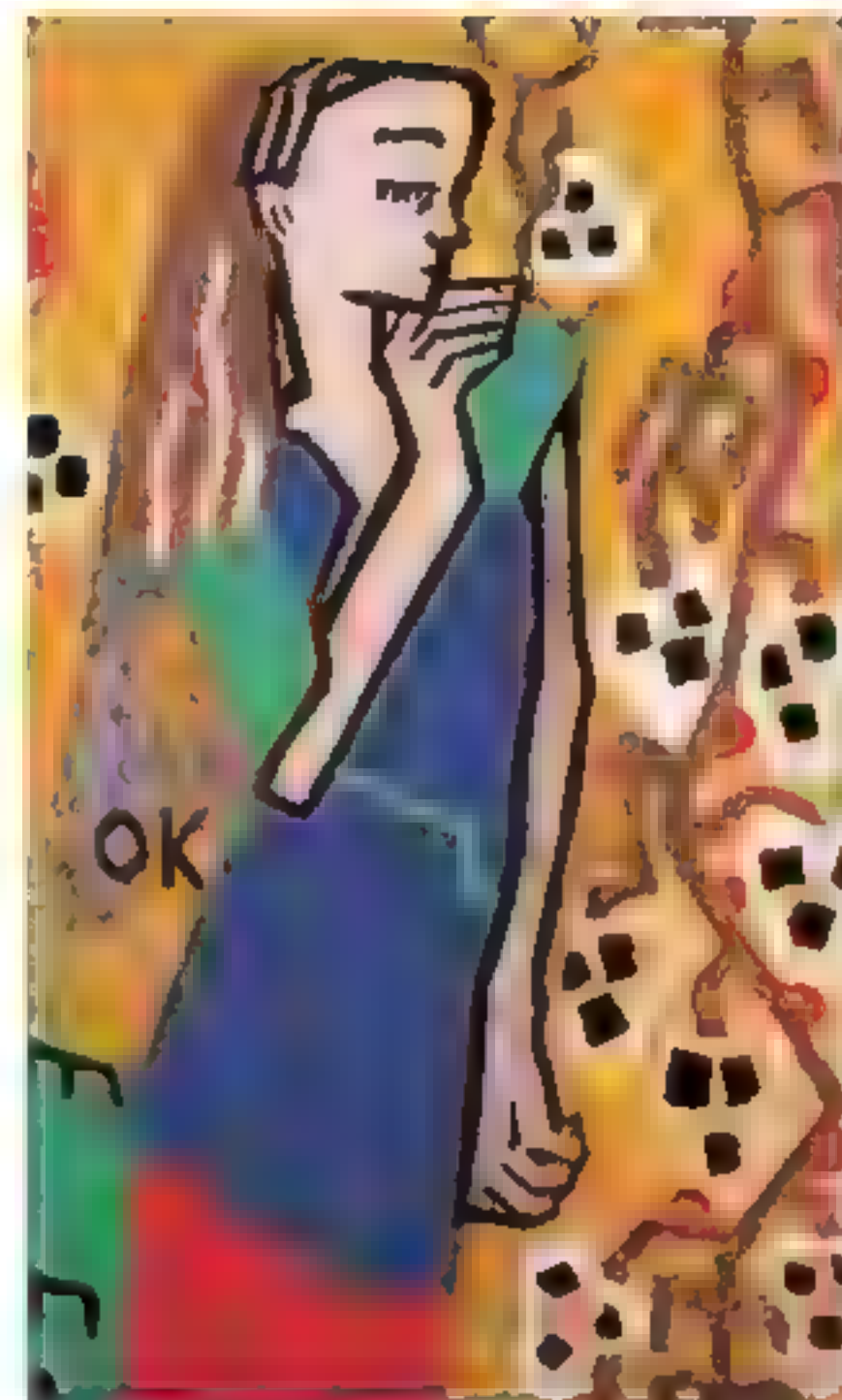


THE SELF AND THE PSYCHE

A potent aspect of Expressionism was the conviction, held by its creators, that their endeavours were carrying art into a wholly new realm of experience. Expressionist art could display spectacular technical innovation, as even relatively early works by Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka make clear. However, formal, surface qualities were a means, not an end. Expressionism aspired to give form to nothing less than a new kind of inward *vision*. It involved a heightened perception that appeared, to some viewers, to verge on clairvoyance. Expressionists sought an intimate, subjective, and deeply resonant communication between the artist and the viewer. Kokoschka described it as “form-giving to the experience, thus mediator and message from self to fellow human. As in love, two individuals are necessary. Expressionism does not live in an ivory tower, it calls upon a fellow being whom it awakens”. This chapter considers this longed-for mediation between the “self” and the viewer by focusing on the work of some of those Expressionists who probed most deeply the psychic life of themselves and their subjects.

Straining against the moral grip of conventions of thought, speech and behaviour inherited from the nineteenth century, Expressionism was the means by which many artists and writers tried to give free expression to the instinctively, authentically wayward psyche – to break out of the straitjacket, as it were. Sigmund Freud’s research into the unconscious and the processes of repression – whereby painful memories or unacceptable impulses are consigned to the unconscious – only appeared to confirm the existence of a powerful and conflict-ridden “inner life”. In attempting to give expression to repressed aspects of the psyche, Expressionist art, literature, theatre, dance and music therefore tended to emphasise what was unruly, violent, chaotic, ecstatic or even demonic. *Eros* and *Thanatos*, sex- and death-drives, were recurrent underlying themes. This kind of excavation of the psyche was especially marked in the radical new art that started to emerge from Austria around 1910. As Vienna’s definitive satirist Karl Kraus, put it, “form is not the dress of thought, but its flesh”.

Arnold Schoenberg was a serious painter as well as a composer. By 1909, he said he felt aware that, in his music, he had broken all ties with the past. He was now following, he claimed, a kind of inner compulsion. This was the year he was rapidly composing works such as his one-act opera, *Erwartung* (Expectation). It revolves around the inner thoughts and emotions of its only character, an unnamed woman, searching for her lover, who she finds has been murdered. Given the impact of Freud’s work in Vienna on the interpretation of dreams, the “royal way to the unconscious”, as Freud put it, it is telling that Schoenberg suggested that his woman’s interior monologue may be an anxiety dream. The scholar of German literature and music, Henry Lea, has described *Erwartung* in terms that could equally apply to the raw directness and psychological content of paintings by Kokoschka or Schiele at the same time in Vienna.



Egon Schiele,
Kneeling Girl in Orange-Red Dress,
1910

Gouache, watercolour and black crayon
on paper, 44.6 x 31 cm.

The Leopold Collection, Vienna

Oskar Kokoschka,
Cotton Picker, 1908

Tempera painting, 94.5 x 39.2 cm
Kunsthalle, Hamburg.



Gustav Klimt,
The Kiss (detail), 1907-1908.
 Oil, silver and gold plating on canvas,
 180 x 180 cm
 Belvedere, Vienna.

Egon Schiele,
Dead Mother I, 1910
 Oil and pencil on wood,
 32.4 x 25.8 cm
 The Leopold Collection, Vienna.

"The music follows the broken phrases and jagged emotions of the woman with an even more unstructured score. All the traditional elements of musical form are missing ... It is an improvisatory work that communicates the woman's fear and memory with unprecedented immediacy, that is, without having undergone a shaping or sublimating process".

Schoenberg's hallucinatory *Red Stare*, which he painted not long after, is one of several such images dramatising powerfully this kind of intensified subjective vision.

Vienna was a highly distinctive crucible of Expressionism. In a city long dominated by its mighty musical heritage and its passion for theatre, the visual arts emerged from historicist obfuscation relatively late, in 1898, with the Vienna Secession. In the first issue of their journal, *Ver Sacrum* (Sacred Spring), its founders announced their mission to provide the antidote to the perceived provincialism and cultural isolation of Vienna "behind the Kahlenberg". Led by the charismatic, sexually rapacious, kaftan-wearing Gustav Klimt, the Secession was to be contemporary, modern and true to its time. The golden motto adorning the entrance to its temple-like headquarters in Vienna encapsulated the principle, "*Der Zeit ihre Kunst, der Kunst ihre Freiheit*" (To the Age Its Art, to Art Its Freedom). The Vienna Secession's weakness, though, was that it sought to offer both a brave new modern identity and a refuge *from* modernity. Furthermore, although it aspired to make art common property, it was also beholden to a wealthy élite. Nonetheless, it succeeded in scandalising the censorious majority from time to time, until Klimt and his followers abandoned the Secession in 1905. In fact, the Secession's mildly contradictory nature was as nothing compared with Vienna itself, city of paradoxes, where stifling petty bourgeoisie coexisted with radical libertinism.

In retrospect, one of the most promising young painters in early twentieth-century Vienna was Richard Gerstl. He studied at the Vienna Academy (where he was quite out of place) but never exhibited, and was barely known in his lifetime. His paintings convey the sense of a febrile subjectivity hovering between strident self-assertion and unhinged emotion. Gerstl's body in the nude self-portrait he made towards the end of his life, for example, is tautly described in strong, deft strokes, while his own self-scrutinising gaze, more of an unfocussed stare, is blurred (p.58). The nervousness of the stippling around the eyes and the rapid looping scribbles in the painting's surface to the right of the figure amplify the sense of agitation. Perhaps inevitably, Gerstl's works have come to be read in the light of his own tragic biography. At the time he painted this self-portrait, he was embroiled in an ill-advised affair with Mathilde Schoenberg, wife of the composer, who was himself a former friend of Gerstl's. Her eventual rejection of Gerstl as a lover triggered a mental breakdown that drove him to suicide at the end of 1908, at the age of just twenty-five.

Schiele and Kokoschka, the two foremost figures of Austrian Expressionism, emerged from a fertile milieu pervaded by the aftermath of Secessionism, but most especially by the influence of Klimt. A crucial turning point in Viennese artistic life was the *Kunstschau* of 1908. This exhibition was mounted by Klimt and his colleagues to survey the best of contemporary Austrian art, including a strong representation of the decorative arts and the work of promising students. It launched the career of the young Kokoschka, who made





a poster for the exhibition and showed, among other objects, his Wiener Werkstätte book, *Die traumenden Knaben* (The Dreaming Youths). Klimt praised him as “the greatest talent of the younger generation”.

The following year's *Kunstschau*, in 1909, introduced the public to the work of Schiele, then still a nineteen-year-old student, but already convinced of his own genius. Of the two young artists, Schiele was most affected by Klimt's work. He even called himself, precociously, the “Silver Klimt”. Schiele's exhibits included a portrait of his fourteen-year-old sister in the public guise of a demure, fashionable young woman. The many studies on paper he made of her soon after articulate a complexity of character only hinted at here. The glazed expression and stylised fabric decoration of the painting are Klimt's legacy, but her isolation in a pale void and the slight tilt of her figure are suggestive of the instability that would very soon so enliven Schiele's work.

The new direction in which these younger artists were taking art – away from *Jugendstil* and towards Expressionism – becomes clear if we compare Klimt's most celebrated work, *The Kiss* (p.52), with a painting, produced a few years later, by his one-time protégé. Klimt's painting was exhibited for the first time at the 1908 *Kunstschau* in a special room, the centrepiece of the whole show, reverently devoted to sixteen of his most recent works. *The Kiss* had its sources in two luxuriant mural schemes that he had already completed: the *Beethoven Frieze* of 1902 and the mosaics he designed in 1905-1909 to adorn the dining room of Josef Hoffman's Palais Stoclet in Brussels. It is an opulent icon to sensuality, but just decorous enough that it was bought by the government. In a magical, ethereal dreamscape, a man embraces and supports a woman who swoons at the touch of his kiss to her cheek. All glitters with silver, gold and tiny flower-blossoms. The biomorphic shape of a halo-like aura surrounding the couple evokes simultaneously the religiosity of an altarpiece and the fertile blossoming of sexual passion. Klimt himself was characteristically blunt about his painting's eroticism. He explained to friends (including Schiele) that in the neck of the man, he meant to evoke not only his potency, but also the back of the penis.

Schiele knew Klimt's painting very well. He made several drawings related to it, some more irreverent than others (one had Klimt's couple at a somewhat further stage of foreplay). But these were small, private works. It was in 1912 that he took on its vision of the loving embrace, overturned it, and presented it in a bold gesture of defiance to the wider public. Schiele converted the blissful, self-absorbed lovers into furtive fumlbers in the dark, anxious and painfully self-aware. Schiele's *Cardinal and Nun* is also sometimes known by the ironic title he gave it, *Liebeskosung*, meaning a loving “caress” or “embrace”. He painted it on release from his spell in prison after some of his drawings had been confiscated and he had been accused of a range of offences against public morality. This sheds light on the underlying pleasure- and pain-ridden theme of the painting: neither prescriptive moral laws nor attempts at emotional repression (what the guidance books for the youth of the day called “*Selbstbeherrschung*”, or “self-control”) can contain the power of the erotic urge.



Egon Schiele,
Three Girls, 1911.
Watercolour and pencil, 48 x 31.5 cm.
Private collection.

Egon Schiele,
Two Girls Embracing (Friends), 1915.
Gouache, watercolour and pencil,
48 x 32.7 cm.
Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest



Egon Schiele,
*Self-Portrait Standing in Lavender Shirt
 and Dark Suit*, 1914
 Gouache, watercolour and pencil,
 48.4 x 32.2 cm
 Albertina, Vienna

Egon Schiele,
*Self-Portrait with Black Cloak
 Masturbating*, 1911.
 Gouache, watercolour and pencil,
 48 x 32.1 cm.
 Albertina, Vienna.

Comparing the two great paintings is instructive of the differences between the sophisticated decadence that Klimt worked to enfold his subjects in, and the raw, conflicting psycho-sexual instincts that Schiele worked to reveal. Schiele converted Klimt's differentiated decoration of the masculine and feminine drapery (stereotypically, one geometric, the other biomorphic) into a stark play-off between the cardinal's red and the nun's black. The luxuriant "halo" of hair literally blossoming around the head of Klimt's woman contrasts with the starkness of the nun's habit. Her pliancy in the arms of her lover becomes, in Schiele's vision, a petrified stiffness as the nun presses herself rigidly against the cardinal's body in an ambivalent gesture that suggests both resistance and submission. While Klimt's figures float on a verdant carpet in a starred cosmos, Schiele's cling to one another against a dark abyss. The most adroit, and doubly iconoclastic, aspect of Schiele's image of the guilt-laden couple, however, is their posture. Working from the blueprint of the kneeling position of Klimt's woman, Schiele has his ecclesiastical lovers locked in the position of prayer as they embrace. Thus, veneration of the loved one is the theme common to both paintings, but while Klimt makes the sexual act sacred, Schiele makes the sacred act sexual.

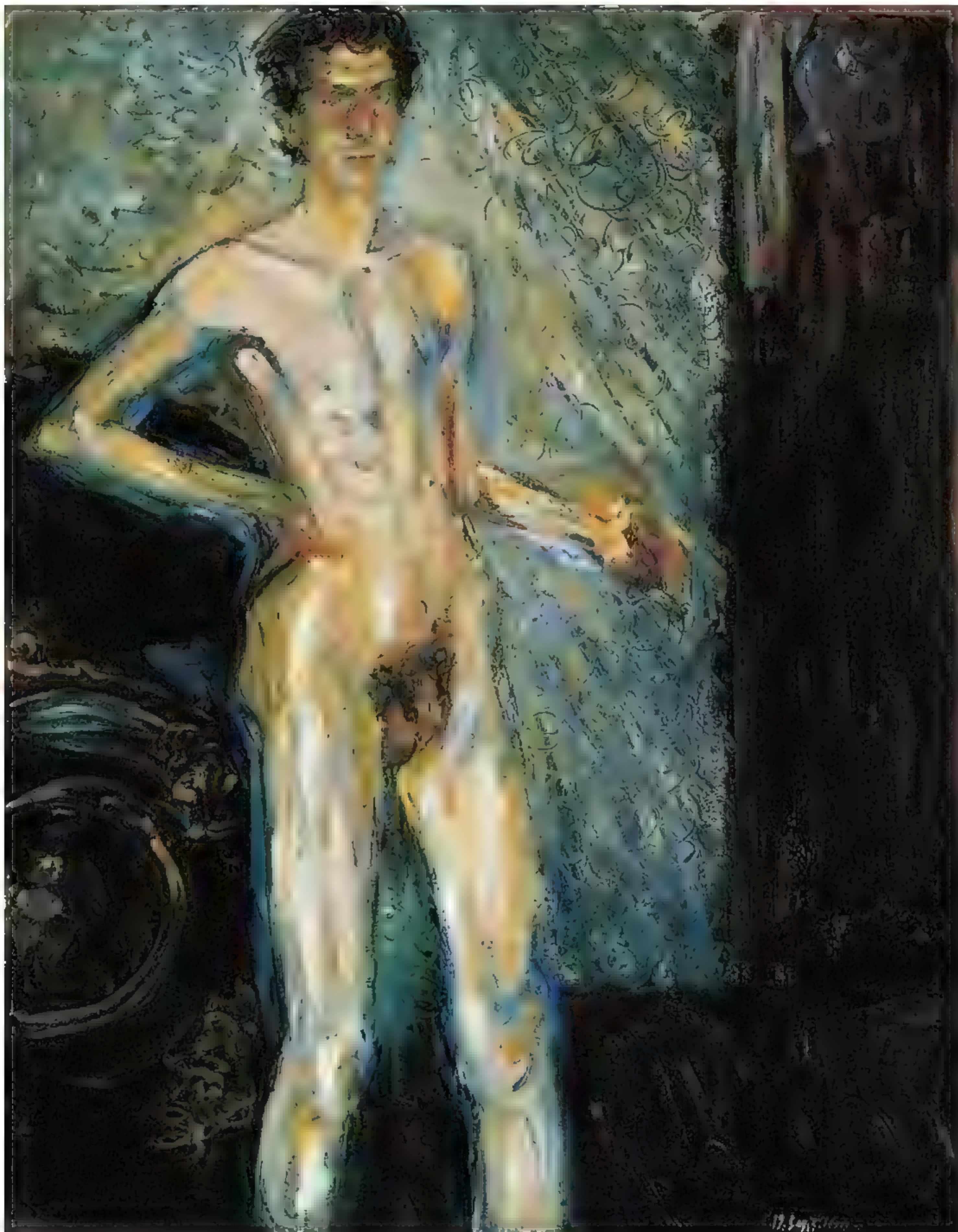
The atmosphere of moral repression and sexual hypocrisy in Vienna is the key context for the development of Expressionist culture there. Even the most respectable restaurants had *chambres séparées* to facilitate post-prandial intercourse and prostitution was rife. Yet what has been called Vienna's "institutionalised promiscuity" coexisted with the demands of dutiful conformity to the institutions of family, church and state. Kokoschka felt suffocated in Vienna. "I'm often so stifled", he wrote in a letter, "that I scream into my screwed-up bedclothes just to do something real". Kraus likened Vienna to an isolation cell in which one was allowed to scream. In his magazine, *Die Fackel* (The Torch), he lamented the damaging effects of sexual moralism's hypocrisy on both men and women.

"Away with the prudishness that has been undermining the physical and mental health of the nations for almost two millennia! ... Dignity and self-possession are prescribed for the middle-class woman, while the man is permitted a bestial self-indulgence. He therefore canalises the splendid torrent of female sensuality for his own uninteresting needs, and his brain is left empty in the process".

In his studies of the human body – both his models' and his own – Schiele effectively annihilated the buffer of distance created by conventional notions of decorum or traditional concepts of "the nude". Schiele's many representations of himself alone, hundreds of them, cannot be summed up in one all-encompassing statement. His self-portraits range from self-stagings in obscure allegories (in the case of several oil paintings) to narcissistic posturing, cringing withdrawal and brutal, unrelenting exposure (especially in the case of the works on paper). In this sense, there is a strong element of performance in his artistic practice. There are even traces of humour in some of them, albeit of the black kind found in *Cardinal and Nun*. Indeed, Schiele was said to have hated deadly seriousness.

In a work like his 1911 gouache *Self-Portrait*, there is something of the qualities that Dürer's definitive biographer, Erwin Panofsky, saw in the great German master's own rare





and uncompromising nude self-portrait. Around the time that Dürer made this private work, in about 1503, he was recovering from a feverish illness that may have been the plague. Panofsky's memorable phrase was: "The convalescent painter looks at his emaciated body and still haggard face with the same mixture of fatigue, apprehension and dispassionate curiosity with which a farmer might take stock of his crops after a bad storm".

In a gesture that is inwardly narcissistic, outwardly challenging but also has something of this *dispassionate* quality, Schiele depicted himself masturbating, his parted cape, flushed cheeks and furrowed brow conveying an ambivalent sexual experience at best (p.57). The fact that Schiele's father was syphilitic, and that his mother gave birth to several still-born children as a result, has led to much speculation around Schiele's own relationship with the body, sexuality and mortality. He drew himself making love to his wife, other couples, lesbian lovers, very candid images of children and graphic visions of his own sexual fantasies. Departing from the academic nude (in which nudity is really a form of dress), his drawings convey a powerful sense of his subjects' nakedness. Almost inevitably, this is sometimes accompanied by a sense of his sitters' unease with their own physicality. At other times, especially in some works from about 1913 onwards, his subjects are barely differentiated, coolly observed, as mortal substance. In a 1914 drawing, for example, the short hatched marks on his two models' flesh evoke (among other things) connotations of rough stitching, and hence of scientific, post-mortem dissection. This kind of drawing can be seen, at least metaphorically, as an exercise in the pursuit of "truth" that dissection also involves.

The artist's "interior" vision is strongly suggested in several works by Schiele in which he depicts himself with eyes closed, or blind, almost *eyeless*. They include oil works in which he appears as a "*Selbstseher*" (Self-Seer). On one level, the painting can be read as a reflection on the nature of "seeing" itself. The self-portrait genre is by definition an exercise in "self-seeing".

However, the conventional relationship between subject (seer) and object (what is seen), which is already destabilised in self-portraiture, since the artist takes on both roles, is *doubly* blurred here. Two kinds of "seeing" are going on. His eyes shut, as if in sleep or meditation, Schiele "sees" himself – and his mortality – in the double image, like a projection behind him. Fossil or phantom, the bleached and shrouded form is disembodied. In fact, Schiele also referred to the painting as *Death and the Man*. In so doing, he created a highly original take on the traditional *vanitas* theme in art, in which the presence of death, traditionally in the shape of a skull or a skeleton, reminds us of our own transience on earth. Both themes – of vision and of mortality – are powerful and recurrent in Viennese Expressionism.

Not long before Schiele made these remarkable works, death and the conflict between the sexes was savagely dramatised by Kokoschka. As part of the programme of events around the *Kunstschau* in the summer of 1909, the Viennese public also had the opportunity to take in performances on an open-air stage. On a tiny budget and using student actors and home-made costumes, Kokoschka staged his one-act play, *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer, Hope of Women), now regarded by many as the first Expressionist drama.

Richard Gerstl,
Nude Self-Portrait with Palette, 1908
Oil on canvas, 139.3 x 100 cm.
The Leopold Collection, Vienna

It was accompanied by his “comedy”, *Sphinx und Strohmann* (Sphinx and Strawman) *Morder* is short and copiously bloody. The action takes place by torchlight. It has no plot – the first performance involved a good deal of improvisation – but the central themes are of sexual longing, frustration and violence. The play has also been seen as a warning of the increasing appetite for war in patriarchal society, or what Kokoschka called “masculine civilisation”. In the course of the drama, Man, Woman and their respective male and female entourages, or “choirs” confront one another in a lust-fuelled, animalistic conflict. The play ends with the ritualistic slaughter of Woman by Man. In so doing, it perpetuates a *leitmotiv* of Viennese modernism, the tie between sex and death.

Kokoschka produced an unforgettable poster for the play (p.68). Its harsh reworking of the traditional *Pietà* image involves a morbid embrace in which a cadaverous woman clasps a blood-red male figure, flayed and expiring. The blotted sun and moon, symbols of the male and female, respectively, hang in an inky void.

Kokoschka's reputation in German avant-garde circles was sealed by the publication, in Herwarth Walden's Berlin-based journal, *Der Sturm*, of *Murderer, Hope of Women*, together with a series of drawings for it. According to Walden's wife, Nell, half the paper's subscribers cancelled their order on its appearance. Kokoschka's own description of how he prepared his actors for the stage gives an interesting insight into these images.

“Because there wasn't any money, I had made [my actors] scanty costumes of rags and pieces of cloth ... The faces and bodies, as far as they remained naked, I had painted ... In a similar way, I decorated their arms and legs with the lines of nerves, muscular cords and sinews, as one can see it in my drawings”.

By this time, in 1910, Kokoschka had moved to Berlin to work for Walden on his new magazine. Besides acting as general office dogsbody, Kokoschka's input on the visual arts side was vital. *Der Sturm* quickly became the most important periodical for both Expressionist art and literature. He painted the short-sighted editor's portrait. He made it smearing and dragging the thin paint, leaving several areas of canvas bare and using his fingers – his fingerprints can be seen muddying Walden's famous blond hair and smudging his white collar. When Kokoschka did use brushes, he liked them dirty. Although he could be quite shy, Kokoschka also continued to live up to his reputation as *Oberwildling* (chief savage) in avant-garde Berlin. He kept his head completely shaved. It seems that he sometimes carried his play's theatricalised gore with him into life; George Grosz reported that Kokoschka once appeared at a Berlin ball “with an authentically bloody ox bone, on which he gnawed from time to time”. This would not be the last time that Kokoschka's eccentricity went public.

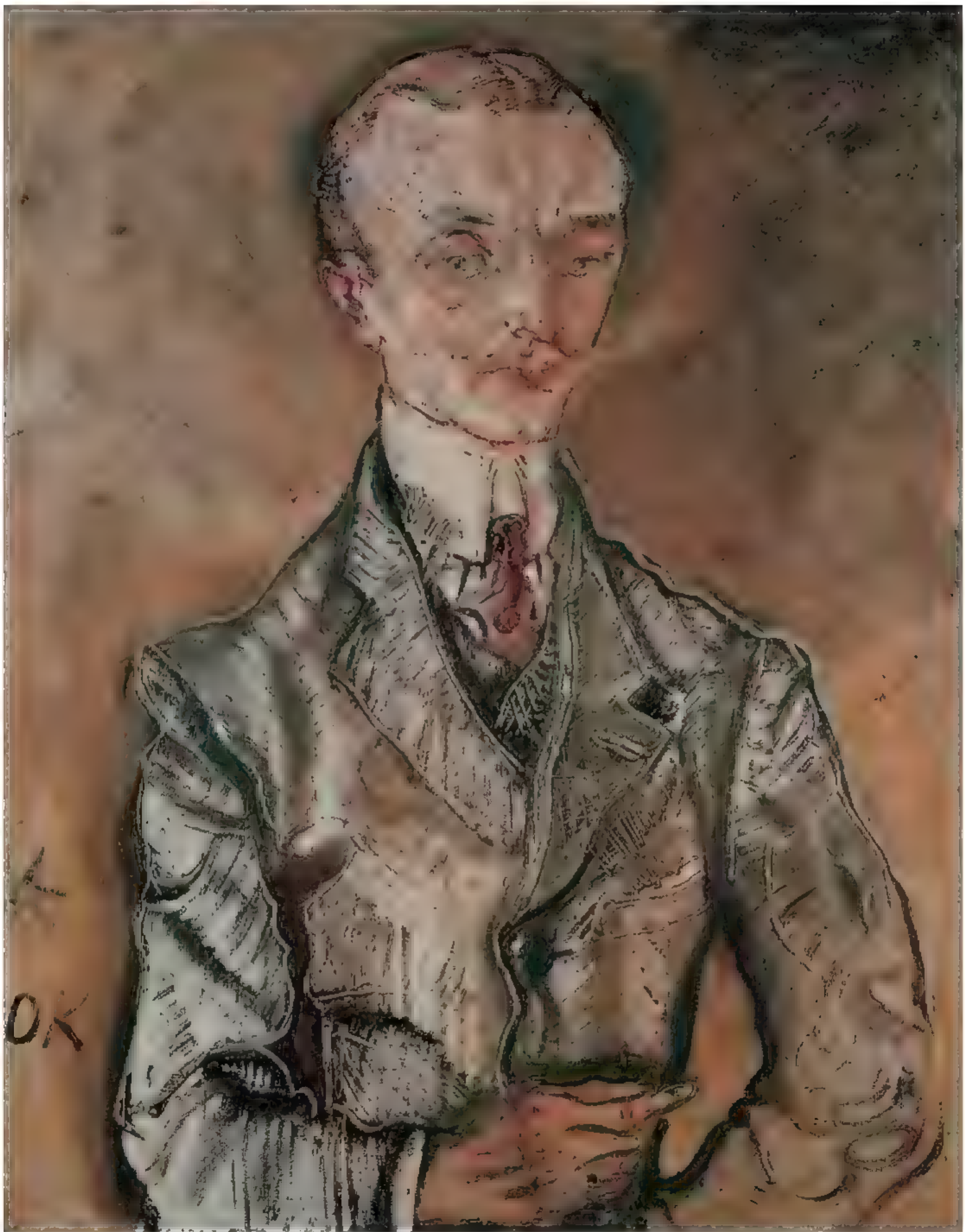
Without a doubt, Kokoschka's greatest achievement in the pre-war years were his portraits. They rank among the most remarkable not only of Expressionism, but of the history of art itself. In the German context, at least until the arrival of Otto Dix, only Lovis Corinth's portraits come close to Kokoschka's capacity for revealing the inner nature of his sitters. But in his extraordinary painting of the aristocratic aesthete Count Keyserling, for example, Corinth did only surreptitiously what Kokoschka was to do as his very *raison d'être*. Kokoschka's friend, patron and mentor, the architect Adolf Loos,

Richard Gerstl,
Portrait of Henrika Cohn, 1908.
Oil on canvas, 147.5 x 111.5 cm.
The Leopold Museum, Vienna.

Oskar Kokoschka,
Marquis Joseph de Montesquiou-Fezensac, 1910
Oil on canvas, 79 x 63 cm
Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

Oskar Kokoschka,
Portrait of Herwarth Walden, 1910.
Oil on canvas, 100 x 69.3 cm.
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart.









seems instinctively to have known that the young artist had a unique ability to draw out an individual's most essential (and hence most elusive) characteristics. He encouraged Kokoschka, in spite of the fact that he had painted almost no portraits to date and his prior training had only been in the applied arts.

Loos believed so fervently in Kokoschka's potential for portraiture that he not only procured a string of wealthy sitters, but also made the assurance (though he could barely afford to) that he would personally buy any portraits that they rejected. At the end of 1909, Loos took Kokoschka to Switzerland with him. Loos's girlfriend, an English dancer (and one half of a performing pair of girls rather functionally named "The Four Legs") had contracted tuberculosis. In hope of a cure, she had entered a Swiss sanatorium. While they were there, Loos gave Kokoschka a letter of introduction to an eminent Swiss zoologist, Professor Auguste Forel, who grudgingly sat for the painter. Kokoschka described his work on the portrait, which was carried out at the professor's home:

"Every evening Forel carefully weighed out nuts and apple peel which he solemnly ate. At last he had finished and sat down. 'Can you see all right?' or 'Does it matter if I go to sleep?' was all he ever said to me. And sometimes he did indeed nod off. Then I could really study the way he sat in his chair, and see how the wrinkles on his face increased and deepened. Suddenly he seemed ancient. Myriads of small wrinkles appeared, like the documents of a man's life, and I felt that I must record them all, decipher them like old parchment and hand them on to posterity. His face and especially his hands, fascinated me. His fame meant nothing to me, but the task set by Loos filled my mind".

In the resulting portrait, Forel's body is so insubstantive as to be almost ethereal. His head – the site of his intellect – and his hands, are what ground the image, but the instability remains. The thumb of his right hand gropes absent-mindedly in his left sleeve. Forel's wife remembered that Kokoschka painted almost all of the portrait using his hands and that he scratched into the thin paint of Forel's head with his fingernails to trace his thin hair.

Before he even went near the canvas, Kokoschka spoke of a "psychological can-opener" as the means to get his models unconsciously to reveal themselves in their most natural state. He encouraged them to relax, read, or lose themselves in their own thoughts, so that he could do his work. The key was that they were not to take any notice of the painter's presence. Already during his life, much was made of Kokoschka's so-called "X-ray vision". The critic Paul Westheim wrote: "It is virtually an X-ray vision, with which the inner man is seen through". This apparently allowed the artist not only to see the "true" inner nature of his sitters, but their past and even their future too. According to Kokoschka, one reason why Forel did not like his portrait and refused to buy it was that it made him look as if he had suffered a stroke. Later, Forel in fact *did* have a stroke. Even more uncannily, Kokoschka's 1910 poster for *Der Sturm* featured his self-portrait as a martyr, pointing to a bleeding chest wound. Five years later, on the battlefields of the First World War, Kokoschka was badly wounded by a Russian's bayonet that pierced his lung.

Egon Schiele,
Portrait of Albert Paris von Gutersloh,
1918.
Oil on canvas, 140 x 101.3 cm.
Minneapolis Institute of art,
Minneapolis.

In the Swiss sanatorium where Loos's girlfriend was interned, Kokoschka found a wealth of unique sitters among the aristocratic consumptives. He said they were like "wilting plants, that even the high-altitude sun could no longer help". He painted Conte Verona, "a little Italian who was a passionate ice-skater and sometimes spat blood". In two separate portraits he painted the Duke and Duchess de Montesquiou-Fezensac, whom he found "very degenerate" and "wonderfully beautiful", respectively (p.62). The Duchess's pale inertia (she was also suffering from consumption) is offset by an intimation of underlying nervousness. Many of Kokoschka's portraits from this early period seem to have been made less by the addition of paint to canvas than by the excavation of material. Kokoschka scraped away pigment to reveal the sitter, often scratching right through to the canvas itself. This highlights a complex and not unproblematic aspect of Viennese Expressionism – the implicit notion that the physical is interchangeable with the psychological. Ironically, in many of these kinds of works, there may be a hangover from the nineteenth-century rationalist passion for photographing and documenting the physical and facial characteristics of mental patients in an attempt to visualise their impairment and categorise their suffering.

Schiele turned increasingly to portraiture of others too. During the war years he drew and painted soldiers, officers, civilian workers, friends, colleagues and his patrons. Some of the most poignant and compassionate portrait studies from this period are of Russian prisoners of war. It appears he planned to paint Schoenberg's portrait, and the composer sat for him in 1917, but only a series of studies on paper materialised. Among his strongest portraits is a painting of his good friend, the painter Paris von Gütersloh (p.64). The tight control of the graphic structure of the image contrasts with an application of paint that is remarkably rough and agitated. Gütersloh's intense stare and unusual posture, hands raised (which in a preparatory drawing looks like a gesture of benediction) contribute to its impact.

This chapter has focused on Kokoschka's and Schiele's most common subjects – people. However, a final note should be made of their work in other genres, such as still life and, especially, landscape. It is striking that even when unpeopled, the natural or man-made world of objects can be invested with a psychological aspect. We see this in Schiele's radically-cropped, intensified views of Krumau, his mother's home town where he lived for a while in 1911, until he was forced to leave by the townspeople when they were offended by his unconventional living arrangements. His paintings of trees have been referred to as "portraits" and are most often autumnal, with all the melancholic connotations that brings.

One of the most spectacular examples of psychological expression through landscape came from an artist known in Vienna from Secession exhibitions and the 1909 *Kunstschau*: the Norwegian Edvard Munch. This is nowhere more so than in his best-known work, *The Scream* (p.67). Munch spent intermittent periods of 1891 and 1892 in Nice, in the south of France. While he was there in 1892, he recorded in a diary entry the following memory of an event, or rather, a sensation he had experienced back in Norway. This is widely held to be the key to the imagery of *The Scream*:

Edvard Munch,
The Scream, 1893
Tempera on board, 83.5 x 66 cm.
Munch-museet, Oslo.



KOKOSCHKA



DRAMA-KOMÖDIE
SOMMERTHEATER IN DER
KUNSTSCHAU
REGIE-ERNST REINHOLD

DRUCK VON ALBERT BERGER WIEN VIII. TIGERSTR. 14

"I was walking along the road with two friends. The sun began to set. I felt a tinge of melancholy. Suddenly the sky became bloody red. I stopped, leaned against the railing, dead tired, and I looked at the flaming clouds that hung like blood and a sword over the blue-black fjord and the city. My friends walked on. I stood there, trembling with fright. And I felt a loud, unending scream piercing nature".

The "scream", then, is *felt* by the figure. It pierces both the environment, and his inner psyche. This is a highly subjective experience, translated into a bloody landscape to convey a sensation of intense anxiety. The effect is amplified by the distortion of objective reality to which the other figures, walking on, are oblivious. A friend of Munch's – Christian Skredsvig – later remembered that when he had been in Nice, Munch had often spoken of his desire to paint the *memory* of a sunset of "coagulated blood". Skredsvig reports that Munch "talked himself sick about that sunset and how it had filled him with great anxiety".

In 1912, Kokoschka's international reputation was boosted further when he showed six paintings at the influential international Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne. He was proud of the fact that one of his paintings was bought by the city's Wallraf-Richartz Museum for 1,500 gold marks. It was a landscape, *Dents du Midi*, painted in Switzerland in 1910 (p.8). Kokoschka's thin, scratchy working of the paint is well suited to evoke what he called "such a nervous light" of the pale January sun. In his autobiography, moreover, Kokoschka described the landscape, retrospectively, in intensely personal terms of conflicting emotions and sublime experience. The passage is a quintessentially Expressionist piece of memoir:

"From the window of my attic room I watched Loos, as he rode away on his sledge. That was space, as I had never experienced it before ... Nature, which before my eyes was becoming outer space, ever wider and deeper, as the rising sun raised the glacier-covered giant crystal, flooded in light from the grey fog. My amazement grew as my protector began to disappear, down across ice and snow, past the pine trees, signposts and telegraph-wires running along the way. The experience of pain at the separation took place in parallel, like an inner wheel on the same axis, with my astonishment at the sunrise. At this moment it became clear to me that a landscape too, cannot simply be objectively represented, nor recorded by a Kodak, as a still life can be painted. The landscape too is alive, it is an experience; so I tried to realise this experience in a painting".

Kokoschka's description testifies to an experience of landscape that is less neurotic, but just as vital, subjective and emotion-laden as Munch's.

The work of all these very different artists, from Gerstl and Schoenberg to Kokoschka and Schiele, broke with the remote aestheticism of the *fin de siècle*. They stripped their subjects of both decorative and decorous surface. Grappling with the themes of sex and death, love and pain, and examining unflinchingly the "way of all flesh", they produced a potent imagery of the self and the psyche and made a crucial contribution to the wider development of Expressionism.

Oskar Kokoschka,
Pietà (Poster for the Summer Theatre in
the "Kunstschau"), 1908.
Colour lithograph on paper,
125 x 82 cm.
The Leopold Museum, Vienna.



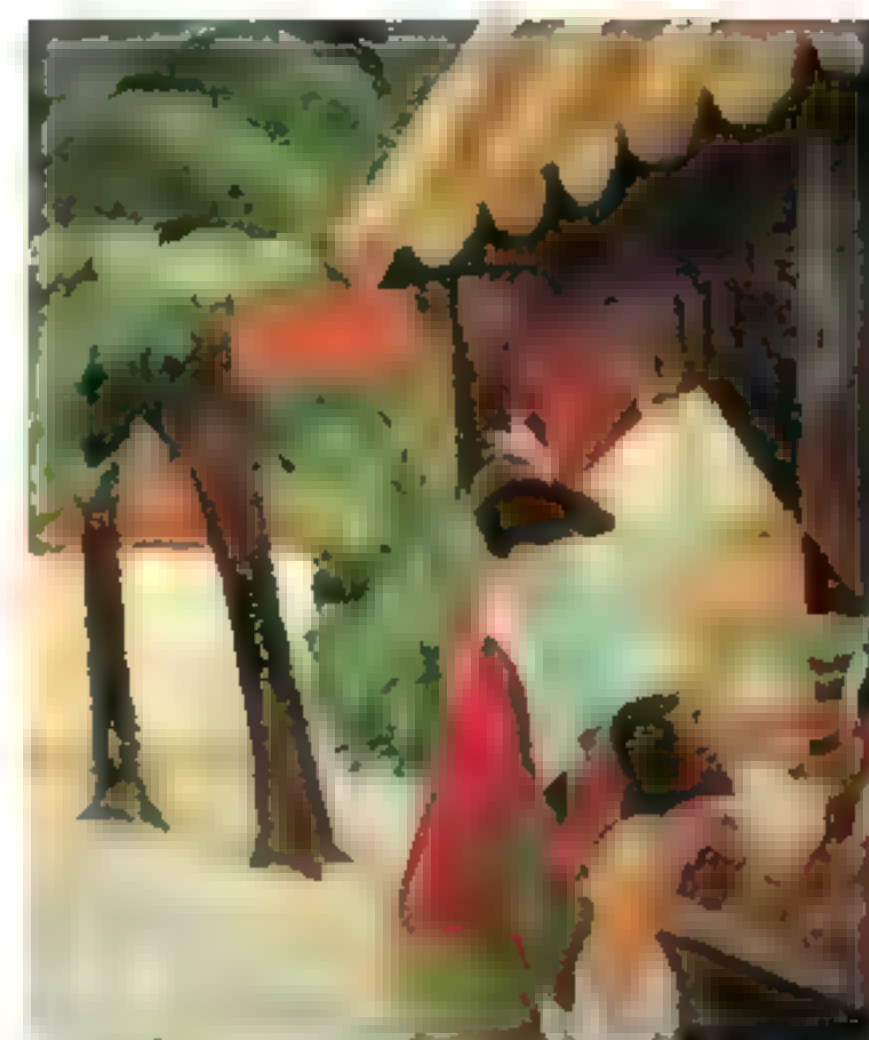
THE METROPOLIS AND MODERNITY

Expressionism was so much concerned with intense sensations, conflicting forces, dynamism, and contradiction that its artists were drawn, horrified or fascinated, to the city. Modern urban experience became the subject and inspiration for a vast swathe of Expressionist art and literature. Some sang ecstatic hymns to the pulsating power and dynamism of the big city. Others mourned its poisoning, alienating effects on the body and the psyche. More prosaically, in the big cities were also to be found the galleries, publishers, dealers, critics, fellow artists, hangers-on and the cafés so vital to artistic life. Artists were drawn to Munich, Dusseldorf, Hamburg, Cologne, Frankfurt and other cities, but above all, they came to Berlin.

There are, of course, many significant Expressionist representations of small, provincial towns. We need only think of the lush, richly coloured visions of Murnau produced by Kandinsky and Münter and the ossified houses and forlorn streets of Krumau that Schiele was painting at the same time (around 1910), calling them “dead cities”, to grasp the range, complexity and importance of a kind of “small-town” Expressionist subject that existed. Even in the big cities, some artists were drawn to peaceful green spaces, where cultivated nature flourished. August Macke of the *Blauer Reiter* circle produced many visions of a modern paradise in the city, based on his sketching trips to Cologne’s Zoological Gardens, for example. Here, strollers commune with exotic and recuperative nature, made possible by money, science and artifice (pp.72-73). In works such as these, there are echoes of the Impressionist flâneur’s interpretation of the city, inaugurated by Charles Baudelaire’s call on painters to paint modern life, and sustained in Germany for several decades by older painters such as Max Liebermann and Max Slevogt.

However, the focus of this chapter is down on the asphalt of the *Großstadt*, the big city, as it appears in Expressionism. The metropolis, and especially its brash and boisterous, newly-moneyed German quintessence – Berlin – gripped many artists and poets. They responded alternately with infatuation and loathing. Confirming again the sheer breadth of practice and diversity of *Weltanschauung* (world view) within Expressionism, George Grosz’s lurid night-visions of sex and death in the war-time metropolis are a world away from Macke’s contented strollers. The poet Georg Trakl saw the deadly “madness of the big city”, but when asked why he didn’t move to the country, he replied: “I don’t have the right to withdraw from Hell”. In the aftermath of war, Max Beckmann saw Berlin as “Hell” too.

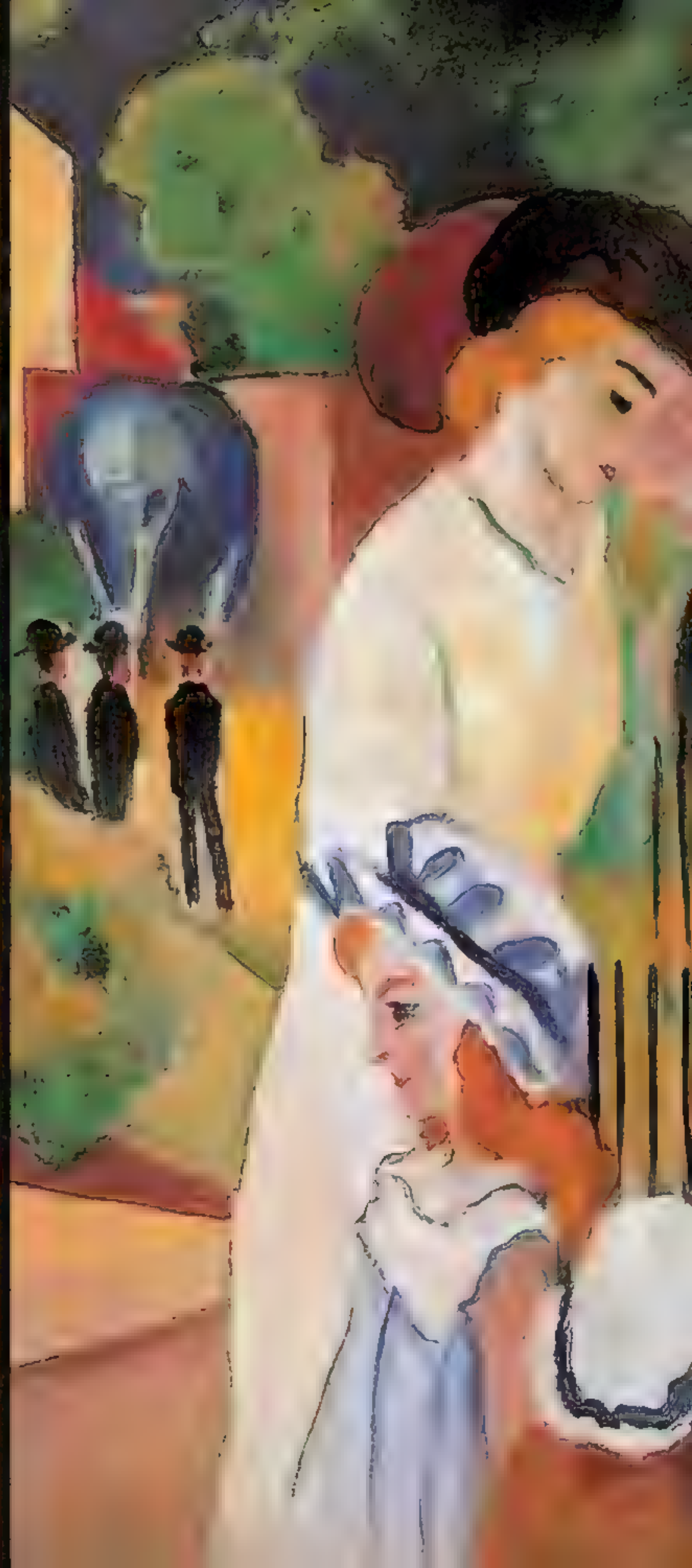
The Impressionists’ cool, urbane surveillance of the city was both intensified and, ultimately, refuted by the Expressionists. The younger Germans’ visions of the metropolis have none of the Impressionist flâneur’s detachment. They tend towards darkness, the night, the deviant and the down-and-dirty experience of the urban jungle. They confront and immerse us, as viewers, in the unruly life of the city.

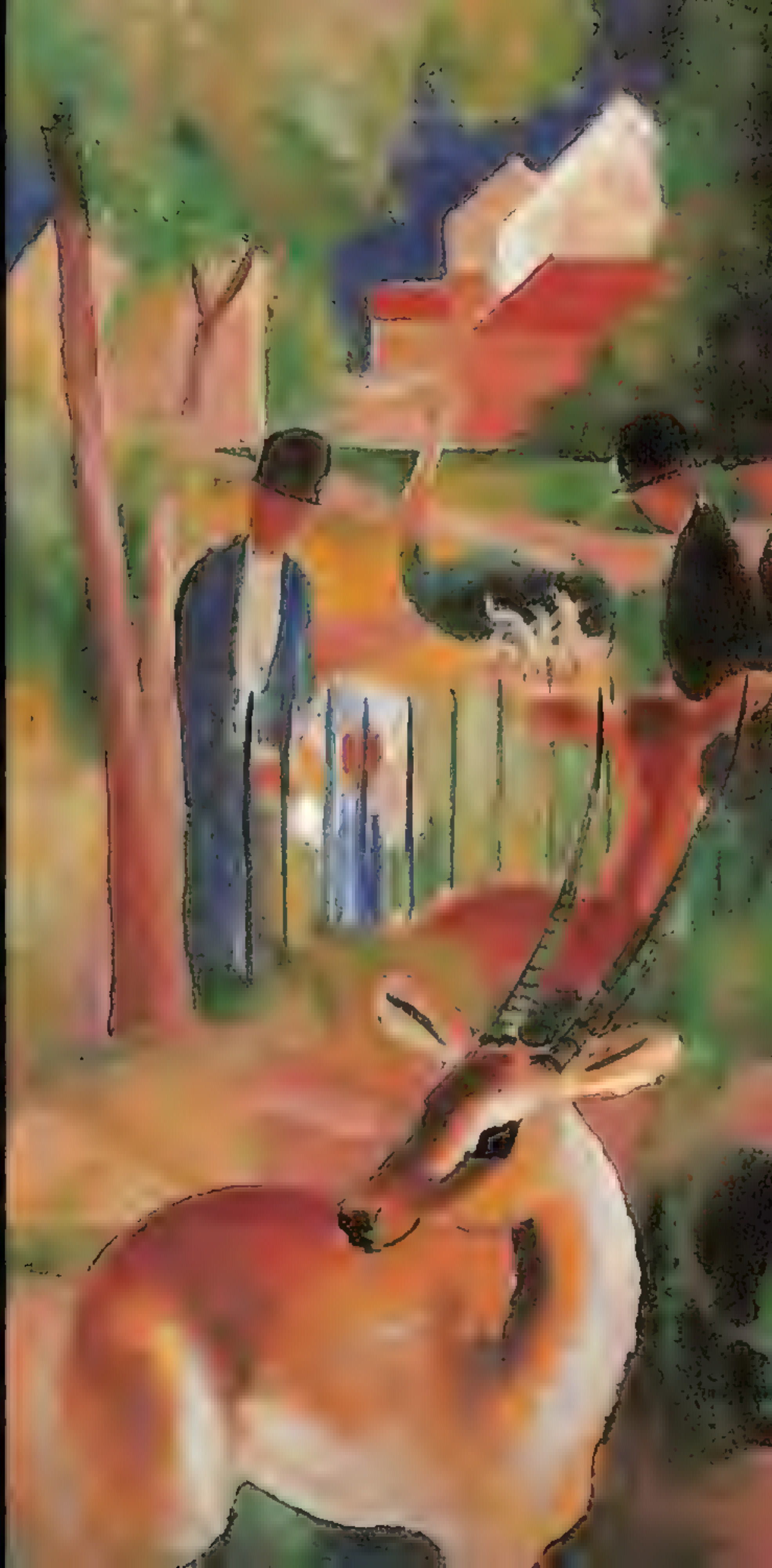
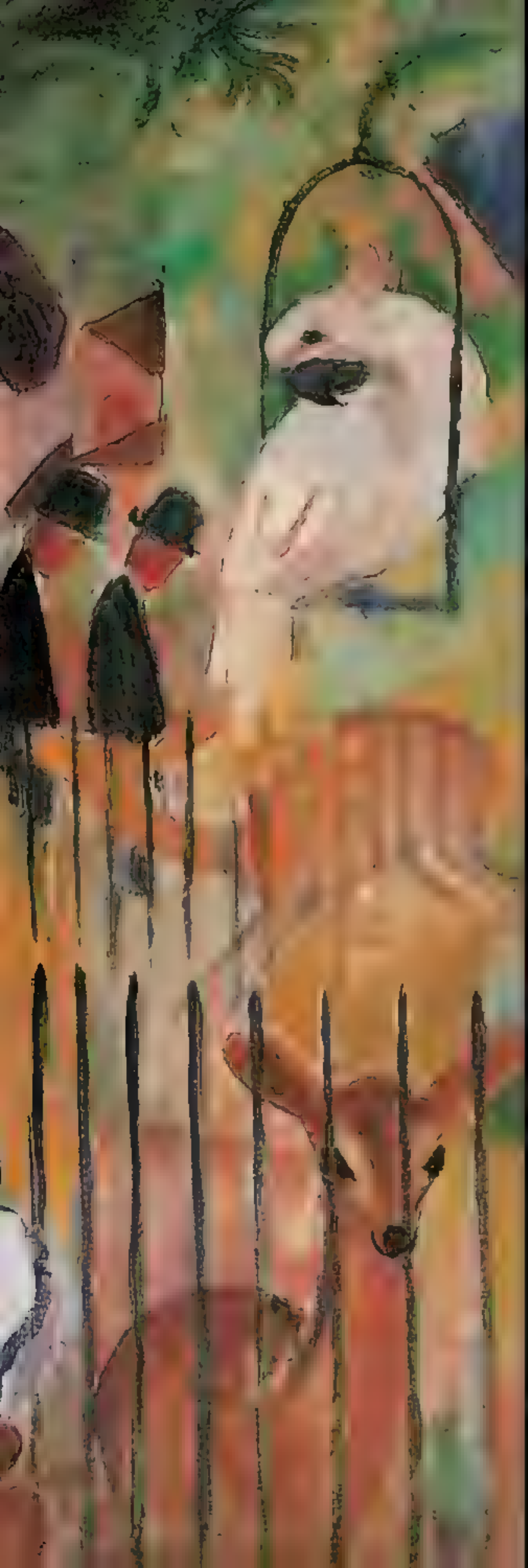


August Macke,
The Walk, 1913
Oil on cardboard, 51 x 57 cm.
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
Munich

August Macke,
In Front of the Hat Shop, 1913
Oil on canvas, 54 x 44 cm.
Private collection.

August Macke,
Zoological Garden I, 1912
Oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm.
Pinakothek der Moderne, Kunstareal
München, Munich.





The influence of Italian Futurism was vital. Umberto Boccioni's painting, *The Street Penetrates the House*, uses the Futurist trademarks of interpenetrating forms and simultaneity to convey the cacophony of the city as it rises, growing, from a construction site. The energies of the street below a woman's balcony mix dynamically and insistently with her private sphere. Through Walden's *Sturm* gallery and the visit to Berlin of Marinetti and his Futurist entourage, German artists absorbed and reworked – though with considerably more ambivalence – the Italians' fascination with the tempo of the city, the force of surging crowds, high-speed vehicles and the night-time effects of electricity.

Berlin in the Expressionist era was a bursting industrial *Weltstadt*, or “world city”. It had become the capital of Germany only quite recently, with unification in 1871. In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the effects of politics and industry combined to suck in workers from across Germany and Europe and launch a massive building boom. The rate of Berlin's industrialisation was drastic in comparison with other European capitals. In 1871, the population of Berlin had been around 800,000. By 1900 it was well over two million and still growing. The inner city became denser, with cramped, six-storey housing for the masses in the shape of endless *Mietshäuser* (rent-barracks) even as the fast-expanding suburbs and luxury villa quarters spread.

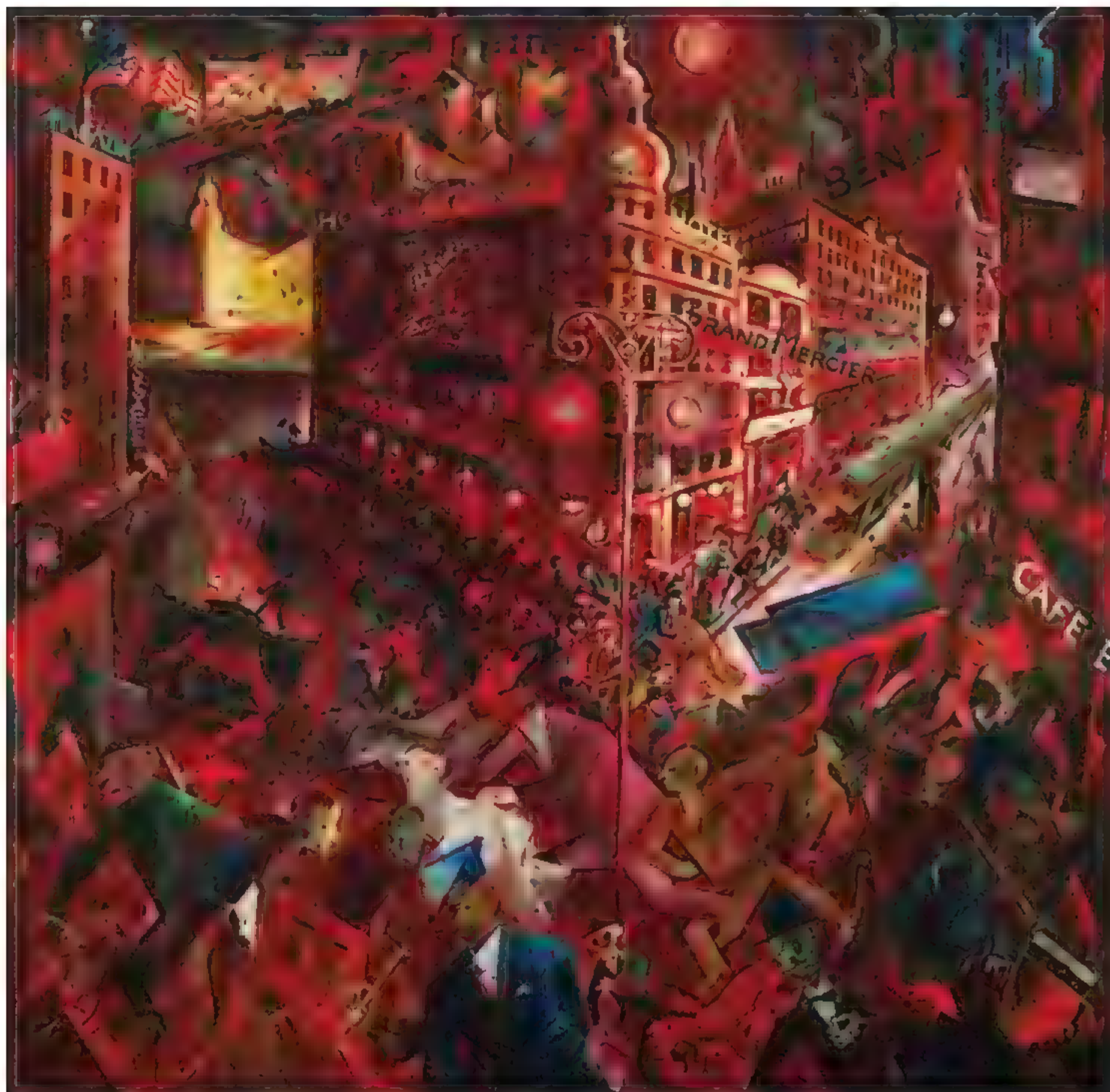
In 1887, the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies had already diagnosed a shift in society from the old, pre-capitalist *Gemeinschaft* (community), in which, as he saw it, individuals remain rooted and essentially united, to post-capitalist, urban *Gesellschaft* (society), in which individuals are fundamentally separated from one another in spite of their proximity. Tönnies saw hostility, mechanical relationships and indifference in the modern city. He hated Berlin. The new German capital exhibited spectacularly all the features of a modern metropolis that came with industrialisation. The city had a high-tech public transport network, electric street lighting, department stores and endless enticing possibilities for distraction. High culture and low entertainment could be had in abundance. As an environment in which extreme wealth glittered amidst grinding poverty, Berlin was also a place ripe for conflict, and even revolution.

Nolde took Berlin in his stride when he visited, in the winter of 1910-1911: “And on we went into the cigarette haze of the cafés in the early hours of the morning, where greenhorns from the provinces sat harmlessly with the street whores and half-nodded off, inebriated by Sekt”. He was fascinated by Berlin nightlife and produced several oil paintings and hundreds of watercolours, woodcuts, etchings and lithographs in response to its sights, sounds and smells. He and his wife would get dressed up and go to masked balls, dances and cabarets. He wrote:

“I drew and drew, the light in the ballrooms, the superficial spangles, the people, all of them, whether bad or good, demimonde or completely depraved, I drew this flip-side of life with its make-up, with its greasy dirt and corruption. It was a feast for the eyes, everywhere. It was sometimes a bit oppressive in these depths among all the foolishly happy or the unhappy people. I drew and drew.”

At that time, the leading light of modern German theatre in Berlin was the director Max Reinhardt, at the *Deutsches Theater*. Nolde sought him out and asked permission to sketch at

George Grosz,
Metropolis (View of the Metropolis),
1917.
Oil on canvas, 100 x 102 cm
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid
Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY





the theatre. He spent night after night at the performances with his wife, in the dark, creating scores of swiftly-executed studies. One of his watercolours shows a scene from Reinhardt's staging of Goethe's *Faust*, with the actor Bassermann as Mephisto, in red, on stage.

Berlin was not the only focus for Expressionists' responses to the city, but it was the most compelling site for them. The sense of separation, rootlessness and alienation in the city was at the root of many Expressionist visions of modern life. In response to the street-level experience, with its crowds of shoppers, commuters, strollers and prostitutes, Kirchner produced some of the most enduring images of urban life on the eve of war. He painted the street lights, trams and trains that dynamised the cityscape. *Leipziger Straße with Electric Tram* conveys an artificially-lit, crowded, hurrying, impersonal world where electricity transforms night into day and people into cargo. Distortions of scale create looming, mannequin-like pedestrians, who dwarf the passengers in the tram. This little human cargo is anonymous, trapped, and crushed down to modern, commuter scale. The scene is oppressively hemmed in by steep buildings, and by the strange, parasol-like beams of light, which illuminate the street, but not the evening sky. The Expressionist poet Alfred Lichtenstein evoked the toxic artifice of the mortifying city and the individual's sense of disintegration in its face:

The night rots. Poisonous lamplight
Has, crawling, smeared it with green filth.
The heart is like a sack. The blood freezes.
The world falls down. Eyes cave in.

Kirchner had painted prostitutes and brothel scenes from as early as 1908. However, in 1913 and 1914 he created a series of street scenes that immortalise the city's "cocottes" – street-walking prostitutes. Whereas the *Brücke's* Dresden pictures celebrated the body, nature and the natural sexuality of men, women and children, Kirchner's Berlin street scenes give cynical, modern-gothic form to sex in the city as it becomes another commodity in the city's night-time economy, hawked by packs of masquerading *haute-couture* vultures.

In 1900, the Berlin sociologist Georg Simmel examined the relationship between prostitution and money. He saw prostitution as a debasement of the self and the senses and deplored the "terrible humiliation inherent in prostitution [which] finds sharpest expression in its equivalence to money". In this equation he perceived a "total and painful imbalance between performance and recompense". As Simmel saw it, the female prostitute "gives" that which is "most intimate and personal for a woman" and receives in return only money. By comparison with Simmel's rather gallant dismay at the violation of feminine intimacy in prostitution, Kirchner's street scenes convey a different take on its transactions. In fact, in some of them, the relationship between prostitute and client suggested by the sociologist is reversed: it is the men around them – all potential clients – who are faceless, their identity compromised. This can be seen particularly clearly in works such as *Friedrichstrasse, Berlin* and in a pastel drawing, *Rote Kokotte* (Red Cocotte) of the same year, 1914 (p. 78). The elongated, strutting women, wrapped in furs and feathers dominate the street in both formal and psychological terms. Behind them, a uniform row of successive, black-suited men recedes into insignificance. Kirchner focuses here less on the debasement of women's most

George Grosz,

Metropolis, 1917.

Oil on paperboard, 68 x 47.5 cm.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by

VAGA, New York, NY

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,

The Red Cocotte, 1914

Pastel on paper, 41 x 30 cm

Staatgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart

Emil Nolde,

A Glass of Wine, 1911.

Oil on canvas, 88.5 x 73.5 cm

Stiftung Seebüll Ada und Emil Nolde,

Neukirchen.





“intimate” possession by men, as Simmel saw it. The anonymous, queue-like rows of figures in these pictures convey an understanding of prostitution in which it is they, the *men*, who are homogenised by their money, they who are taken in quick succession by the prostitutes.

In the wider avant-garde context, it is interesting that Kirchner’s street scenes reverse the socio-sexual dynamics of the brothel, the site that had provided such a rich source of imagery for the preceding generation of the French avant-garde. A series of Parisian brothel monotypes by Edgar Degas, for example, presents a suited solitary male faced with an array of fleshy “merchandise”. He wields the power, economic and sexual. Kirchner overturns this perception of prostitution, which is essentially a modernist reworking of the popular theme of the Orientalist harem or slave-market situation. In drawings he depicted women approaching men on the streets. By focusing on feral, unregulated street prostitution, which was often casual, and the social and sexual transgression inherent in its street-level dynamics, Kirchner makes this traditional relationship ambiguous and unstable. In so doing, he also gives sardonic form to where sexuality, commerce and the city meet.

Often flagrantly disavowing the misery, danger and exploitation involved in prostitution, many Expressionists – artists and writers – saw or imagined in the figure of the prostitute liberated sexuality and vital authenticity. She embodied those instinctive forces that bourgeois morality conspired to contain through the institutions of marriage, the family and educational orthodoxies that allowed no room for the natural expression of sexuality. Thus in Berlin, Richard Huelsenbeck, who moved in Expressionist circles before becoming a Dadaist, explained:

“We whore around here, around the Tauentzienstraße ... Thank God for the whores and their free way of living, they are the authentic people. Sexuality, we have discovered, is very closely related to Expressionism”.

Ludwig Meidner made the chaotic and conflicting, destabilising energies of the city his subject. The Expressionist weekly for politics, literature and art, Franz Pfemfert’s *Die Aktion*, published many of Meidner’s drawings, such as one of crowds thronging Berlin’s Potsdamerplatz. His belief in the primacy of the urban subject and his heightened response to the city’s assault on the senses are conveyed in an ecstatic manifesto he wrote in 1914. It was published in the journal *Kunst und Künstler* (Art and Artists) and begins:

“We must finally start to paint our home, the metropolis, which we love endlessly. On countless canvases the size of frescoes our feverish hands should scribble all the marvellous and curious things, the monstrous and dramatic nature of avenues, stations, factories and towers ... we have to find our own new means of expression ... A street does not consist of tonal values, instead, it is a bombardment of whizzing rows of windows, racing beams of light between vehicles of all kinds and a thousand bouncing spheres, scraps of people, advertising signs and rumbling, formless masses of colour”.

In its course, the manifesto explicitly rejects the Impressionist mode of envisioning the city. It ends with a call to fellow artists for nothing less than a new aesthetic for the urban landscape. Meidner’s explosive description of the city in terms of its “bombardment” of the senses and its “monstrous and dramatic nature” finds its painterly equivalent in the series of cityscapes he painted in 1912–1914, which have subsequently come to be known

Ludwig Meidner,
The Burning City, 1913
Oil on canvas, 66.5 x 78.5 cm.
The Saint Louis Art Museum,
Saint Louis.

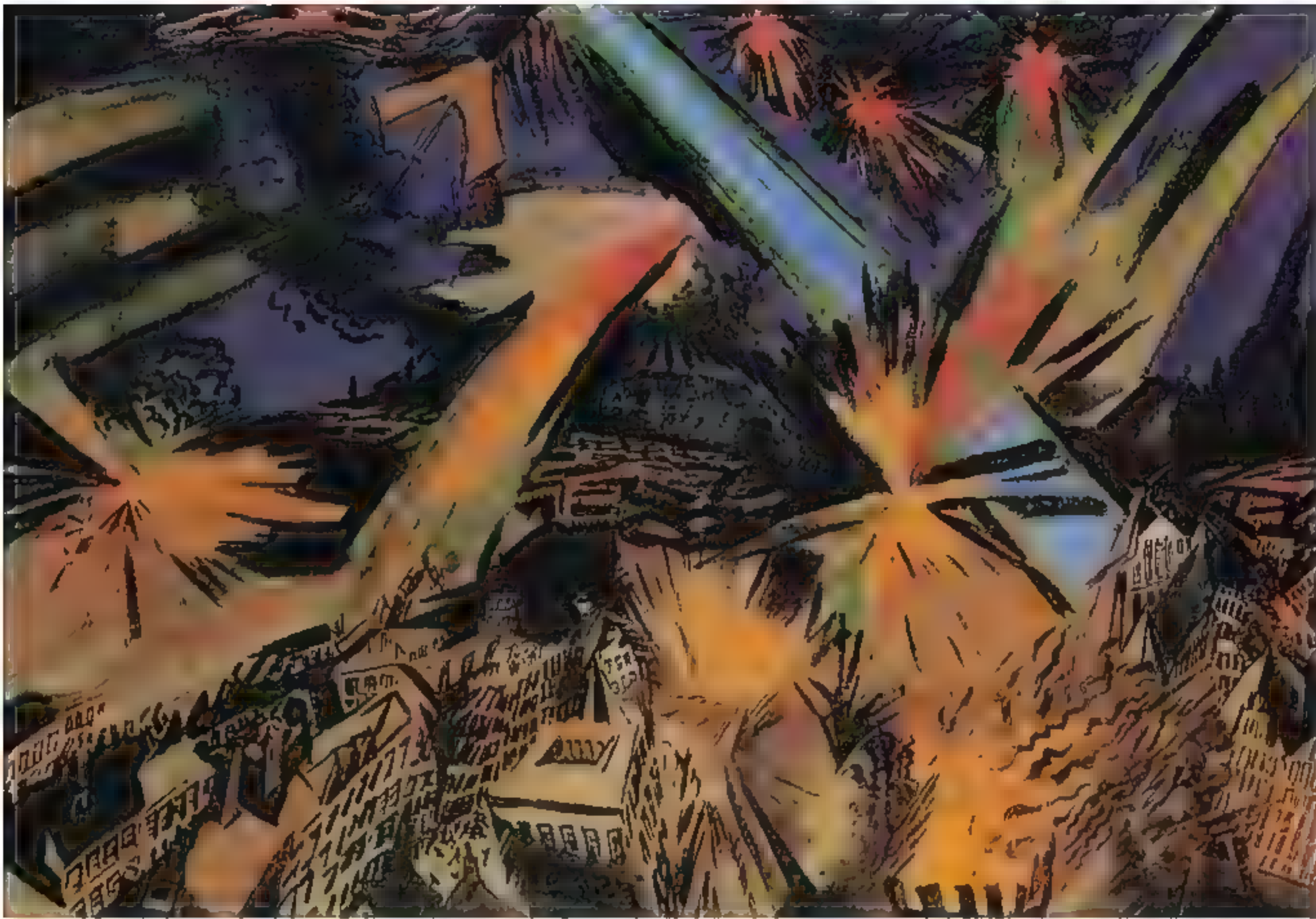




Max Beckmann,
Synagogue in Frankfurt, 1919.
 Oil on canvas, 90 x 140 cm
 Städel Museum, Städtisches
 Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie,
 Frankfurt.

as “apocalyptic landscapes” (p.81). It is tempting to see in these paintings premonitions of the war that was just brewing in Europe as Meidner was painting (p.83). The violent amplification of the city’s frenetic energies to the point of destruction seems to come from the cosmos. The astral firmament above his *Apocalyptic City* explodes with the fires of comets (or bombs?) that crash and burn. In the distance to the left of the corpse-like figure in *Apocalyptic Landscape*, a comet plunges to earth from the black sky as the seas in the centre distance churn. Halley’s comet had appeared in the skies above Germany in 1910, already unleashing fears of an impending apocalypse. Expressionism was itself rife with apocalyptic imagery and prophetic pronouncements of violent doom, sometimes served up with a good dose of black humour. All these elements can be found in perhaps the best-known of all Expressionist poems, Jakob van Hoddiss’ *Weltende* (End of the World). It reads almost as a lyrical version of one of Meidner’s paintings. Indeed, van Hoddiss and Meidner used to walk the streets of Berlin at night together, that is, until the poet ended up in a mental hospital in 1914:

The good citizen’s hat flies off his pointed head,
 Screams reverberate in all the winds.
 Tiles come crashing down and snap
 And the floods – it is reported – are rising on the coasts.



The storm has come, the wild seas skip
 At the land to wear down the fat dams.
 Most people have a cold.
 Trains fall from the bridges.

Max Beckmann's 1919 painting of the synagogue in Frankfurt, under a large sickle moon, while in no way dealing in the explosive aesthetics of Meidner, yet has a dynamic instability about it (p.82) It is the hour of morning prayers in the synagogue, where the lights are on. The morning is Ash Wednesday, at the weary end of carnival celebrations. The small group of revellers wending their way home through the deserted streets includes Beckmann himself (in black). The clashes of perspective, by which houses and street lamps appear to waver and topple are a fitting visual analogy for receding drunkenness after a long night of excess. The word "Nof" ("emergency") can be made out on the advertising pillar. The writer Rudolf Blümner, legendary in Berlin for his poetry recitals, reminded exhibition-goers acidly: "Don't ever say in front of an expressionist picture that the house in it is crooked. Because it's not a house, it's a picture". Nonetheless, in this connection it is interesting to compare an ink drawing by Meidner, called *Betrunkene Straße mit Selbstbildnis* (Drunken Street with Self-Portrait).

As Germany became mired in a disastrous war, its chaos was acutely paralleled in shattered visions of restless flux and conflicting energies on the streets. More than merely

Ludwig Meidner,
Apocalyptic City, 1913.

Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 115.5 cm

LWL-Landesmuseum für Kunst und
 Kulturgeschichte, Münster



responding to the city's surface, Expressionists created visions of the metropolis and urban life that functioned as allegories of the crisis-ridden present. They prised furtive views into violent and dysfunctional lives behind tenement windows. George Grosz, recovering from the breakdown he suffered after serving at the Front, envisaged the city as a place of collective insanity. He described his work on the painting *Großstadt* (The City) in a letter to his close friend Otto Schmalhausen. It is evocative of the horror and fascination of the metropolis and full of as much nervous agitation and violence as the painting itself:

"I'm painting a lot, a big city picture and a smaller one (reds, a lot of reds!) ... I'm full up to my neck with faces – and for me this work means singular emotions, coil-sprung excitement, the roaring street-front onto paper! Woosh, eh? The starry sky wheels above the red head, electricity bursts into the picture, telephones are ringing, women in labour scream, while knuckleduster and flick knife nestle peacefully in the dank pockets of pumps – *ach*, and the labyrinths of mirrors ... – and the port-wine-red, kidney-corroding nights, when the moon is beside infection and cursing cab-drivers, and where the murder by strangulation happens in a dusty coal-cellar – oh the emotion of the big cities!"

Finally, Expressionist artists looked into the bowels, dives, backstreets and nightclubs of the city, where they saw, imagined and painted an unruly culture of sex and spectacle.

In the aftermath of the First World War, many Expressionists began to move towards a cooler approach to their subjects. Urban poverty, exploitation and suffering in the city became preoccupations for several artists, as subsequent chapters will show. Beckmann created an image of claustrophobic physical proximity coupled paradoxically with a sense of profound psychological isolation in the city by looking no further than his own family. His *Familienbild* (Family Picture) of 1920 combines the autobiographical – Beckmann sits, holding a horn, to the left of his family members – with the universal subject of human alienation. Otto Dix painted shabby couples, suicides and sex murder victims – as did several other artists.

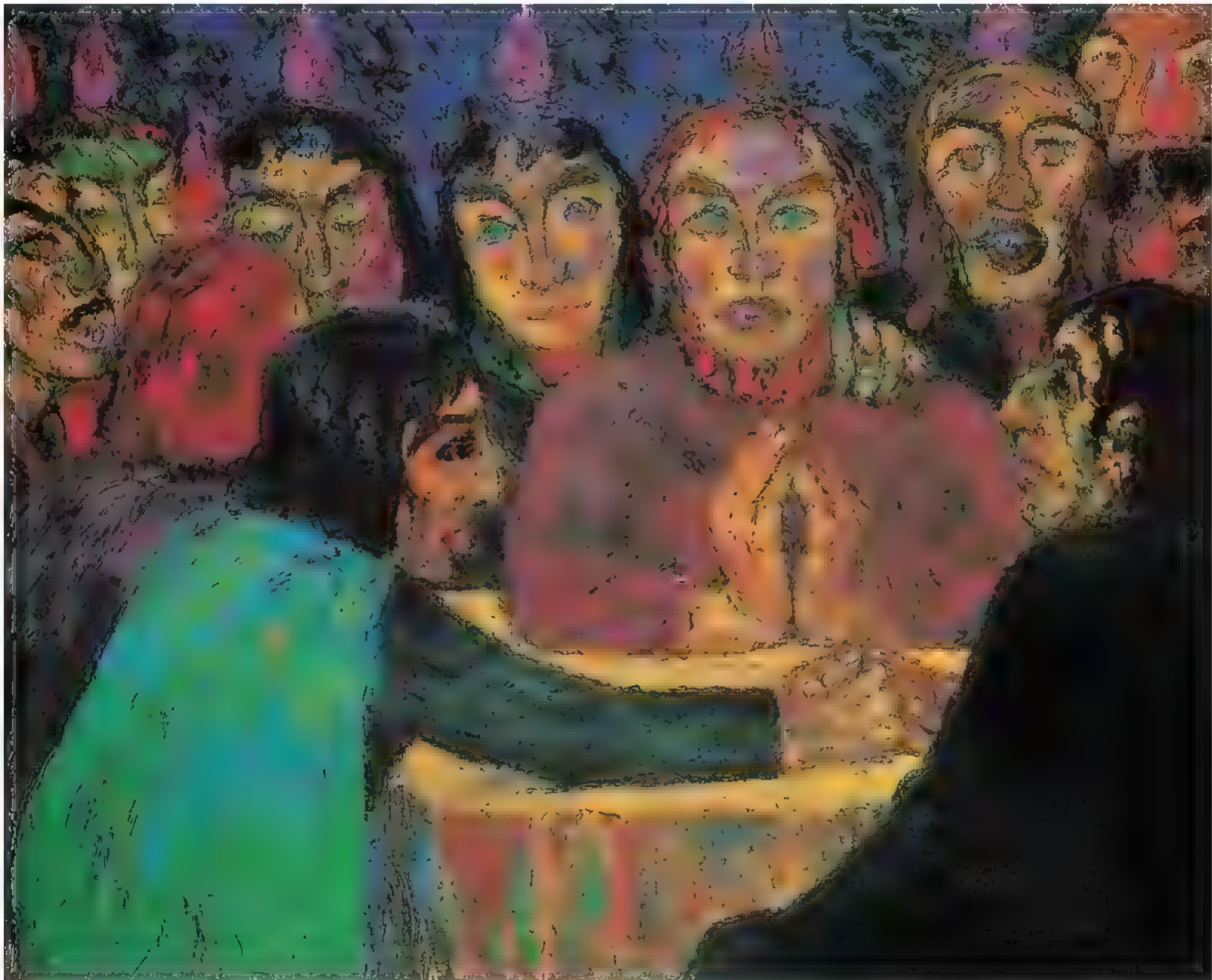
In Hamburg he found brothels housing tired and complacent prostitutes. Heinrich Maria Davringhausen lifted the lid on a blankly gawping "dreamer" with a decapitated corpse and the bloodied murder weapon in his attic room.

Some artists of the generation, like Grosz and Dix, began increasingly to see the city and especially its legion trivial diversions in a cooler, more detached way. In this sense they were observing their surroundings rather in the ironic spirit of Ernst Blass's poem, *Abendstimmung* (Evening Mood):

O come o come my darling! In the bar
The mixer gives away his most secret tip.
It's heavenly, unearthly how your hair
Matches the red of cherry-brandy flips.

The Nietzschean aspects of modernity, conflict, vitality and continual progress, were to be found in abundance in the city. The metropolis, whether experienced as intoxicating or alienating, provided a generation of Expressionist artists and writers with inspiration. However, while some Expressionists looked behind the windows of the city, others sought to penetrate the "veil" of material appearance to give expression to a higher, spiritual reality. This quest is the subject of the following chapter.

George Grosz,
Suicide, 1916.
Oil on canvas, 100 x 77.5 cm
Tate Modern, London
Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY



VISION AND THE SPIRIT

This chapter deals with Expressionist art that relates to concepts of the “spirit” and to faith in the artist’s visionary capabilities beyond merely the “optic”. It encompasses a broad range of work, from representations of saints, seers or subjects from the Old and New Testaments to works that emerged from artists’ attempts to “see” beyond material appearances to a fundamental, spiritual “essence”.

As we have already seen, Expressionism made its claim to avant-garde status and radical authenticity by striking a consciously anti-bourgeois stance. This extended to modes of perception. How the good German burgher “sees” his small world could be contrasted, polemically, against the privileged, intensified “vision” and the universalising dreams of the artist. In 1910, before the term “Expressionism” had fully established itself, Walden was writing in one of the early issues of *Der Sturm*:

“The German lives only in formulae, dogmas and symbols, that is, he doesn’t live at all . . . He . . . always wears rationalist spectacles. They colour the world outside for him. They protect him from the rays of genius. . . . Genius and mysticism are nonsense. Only on the path of analysis and pedagogy does he grant the other the optics of one’s own eye.

Which of course is not enough to make an artist. At the most just a painter. For art does not consist of the correct rendition of external impressions . . . Art demands the invigoration, the movement, the breathing of life into that which is vivid”

Something of this vivifying energy is conveyed in the piercing gaze of Marianne von Werefkin in a self-portrait from 1910. At the height of the First World War, Paul Klee declared “My earthly eye is too farsighted and sees through and beyond the most beautiful things”. The critic Eckhart von Sydow paid homage to the artist in 1919: “The true psychographer, soul-writer, soul-disenchanter, god-charmer, here he is Paul Klee!” We have already seen how Kokoschka was credited with “X-ray” perception. Heckel’s woodcut *Mann in der Ebene* (Man on the Plain) has the artist himself shielding his own eyesight with hands raised to his temples. The posture communicates a fearful and troubled *Weltanschauung*, the burden, perhaps, of highly sensitised perception (p.96).

To a considerable extent, it was the perceived narrowness of vision through “rationalist spectacles” against which many Expressionists’ immersion in the spiritual dimension was directed. Ernst Barlach, who was as prolific and significant a writer as he was an artist, was aware of the danger of over-inflated claims to spiritual profundity. He pondered the tendency of artists to credit themselves with extraordinary faculties of perception. In a private letter he wrote in 1915:

“I really think that we, that is, my artists’ clan, carry on a rather unprincipled pomposity with the mysterious and the inner content of things. We give ourselves dreadful airs and graces, as if we were telegraph exchange operators to the unfathomable”.

Emil Nolde,

Pentecost, 1909.

Oil on canvas, 87 x 107 cm.

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.



Emil Nolde,
The Mocking of Christ, 1909.
 Oil on canvas, 86 x 106.5 cm.
 Brücke Museum, Berlin.

The adversarial – and ultimately elitist – notion of the “enlightened” artist pitted against the uncomprehending majority, sheds light on the heroic or pathos-laden identification of the artistic self with holy figures of martyrdom, which can be found in the work of several Expressionists. An explicit example is Schiele’s depiction of himself as the martyred St Sebastian. He showed himself, pierced with the arrows of criticism, for an exhibition poster in 1915 (p.97)

The sculptor Karl Albiker, near the start of his career, gave memorable form to the figure of the martyred St Sebastian in a wood sculpture of around 1920.

Nolde’s work is distinguished by a highly vivid and fertile imagination. Already, in 1901, he was turning away from nature and towards a private visionary world of fantasy and fairytale, populated by strange hybrid creatures and magical beings. “Strange beings” continue to lurk, float and frolic in his later works.



Between 1909 and 1912, Nolde painted a series of biblical scenes that mark a peak in his career. At the time, they attracted harsh criticism, leaving him hurt and resentful. Nolde's account, in his autobiography, of the process of creating these paintings is significant. He first describes how "imitating and giving form to nature" was no longer enough for him. Next, he was seized by a violent desire to break through appearances: "I rubbed and scratched the paper until I tore holes in it, trying to reach something else, something more profound, to grasp the very essence of things". He then became "deathly ill" and feverish after drinking foul water. A neighbour came by and asked "is he dead yet?" Only half-recovered, he took up work again, drawing Christ and his twelve apostles. Here, Nolde's account of the creative process takes on religious (and typically Expressionist) overtones. There is the instinctive, intuitive act of creation, the ecstatic fusion with the work, obsession and finally, joyful redemption.

Emil Nolde,
The Last Supper, 1909.
Oil on canvas, 86 x 107 cm.
Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

“Without much intention, knowledge, or thought I had followed an irresistible urge to represent profound spirituality, religion, and fervour. A few of the heads of the apostles and a head of Christ I had sketched before. Near shock I stood before the drawing. No image of nature was near me, and now I was to paint the most mysterious, the most profound, most inward event of all Christian religion! Christ, his face transfigured, sanctified and withdrawn, on both sides and before him the circle of his disciples, deeply moved.

“I painted and I painted, hardly knowing whether it was night or day, whether I was a human being or only a painter.

“I saw the painting when I went to bed, it confronted me during the night, it faced me when I woke up.

“I painted happily. The painting was finished. *The Last Supper*” (p.89).

After this, Nolde painted *The Mocking of Christ* (p.88).

Then, he says, “I went down again to the mystical depth of human divine existence”. He painted *Pentecost* (p.86). The influential critic Gustav Hartlaub published a book called *Kunst und Religion* (Art and Religion), in 1919, which was subtitled “an essay on the possibility of new religious art”. In it, he wrote of Nolde’s *Pentecost*:

“His pentecostal disciples of Christ appear at first glance to be painted as if they were wild, babbling freaks in a state of terrible possession until one suddenly discovers in them the familiar features of North German sailors and at the same time a wealth of the most subtle spiritual qualities”.

These pictures inaugurated several years of Nolde’s deepened engagement with subjects from the Old and New Testaments. Another culmination point was his monumental polyptych *Life of Christ* in 1912. Nolde attached great importance to the shift in perception and representation that he felt the religious paintings had involved. “With the pictures *The Last Supper* and *Pentecost* followed the transformation from external optical charm to an experienced inner value”.

Significantly, Nolde also claimed that “simple people” – his country neighbours and relatives in Schleswig-Holstein who dropped by – understood and responded to his religious paintings instinctively, whereas, as he put it, the “half-depraved sophisticates in the superficial glitter of the city” found it difficult. Indeed, these paintings were controversial. Max Liebermann, President of the Berlin Secession, refused to allow Nolde’s *Pentecost* into the 1910 exhibition. In claiming the approval of simple folk, Nolde was, of course, allying his art with a romantic idea of earthy purity and uncorrupted “authenticity” of vision, the antithesis of which was cultivated, educated, metropolitan connoisseurship. These kinds of anti-intellectual and indeed anti-metropolitan ideas were part of a reactionary primitivism, with *volkisch* and even anti-Semitic undertones, which seems to have attracted Nolde and provided him with confirmation for the value of his own work. As an artist, Nolde clearly saw no paradox in this ideological standpoint and his excursions into the colourful depths of Berlin nightlife (as we saw in the previous chapter).

The life, death and resurrection of Christ became important subjects for many Expressionists. Beckmann painted the Deposition of Christ from the cross (p.93). Otto Lange,

Christian Rohlf, *Hagar in the Desert*, 1921
Tempera on canvas, 99 x 67 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen





Max Beckmann,
The Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery, 1917
 Oil on canvas, 149.2 x 126.7 cm.
 The Saint Louis Art Museum,
 Saint Louis.

an artist who excelled in the woodcut medium, produced a harrowing image of the head of the crucified Christ. The spiked forms of the cut woodblock create an agonising visual metaphor for the slicing barbs of the crown of thorns, while the haze of red ink evokes the blood and pain of the crucifixion. The elongated forms and dramatic physical gestures in Heinrich Nauen's large *Pietà* of 1913 refer both to the Gothic tradition of Grünewald and to the mannerism of El Greco, whose works Nauen had seen and greatly admired (pp.94-95). All three works were included in Hartlaub's survey of new religious art. Karl Schmidt-Rottluff produced several woodcuts on biblical themes and a group of unusual painted brass reliefs depicting the heads of the four evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They were made for the chapel at the Cologne Sonderbund exhibition of 1912, but



finally rejected by an ecclesiastical jury. Max Pechstein produced a portfolio series of twelve woodcuts, each illustrating a phrase from the Lord's Prayer.

In the work of artists linked with the *Blaue Reiter*, above all Kandinsky, Marc, and Klee, we find the most developed exploration of the possibilities for a symbolic language of "the spiritual" in a broad, anti-materialist and cosmic sense. Colour played a vital role.

For the writer Theodor Däubler, who was keenly interested in modern art, colour represented "the goods of the cosmos" and the painter was an artist who "writes poetry in colour". Kandinsky discussed at length the different characteristic "sounds" of colours. The artist, as he appears in a thinly-veiled self-portrait by Klee, for example, was also a visionary, inward and contemplative.

Max Beckmann,
The Descent from the Cross, 1917.
 Oil on canvas, 151.2 x 128.9 cm
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Heinrich Nauen,
Lamentation of Christ, "Drove Cycle"
 painted for Drove Castle, 1913
 Tempera on canvas, 210 x 320 cm.
 Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld







Erich Heckel,
Man on the Plain, 1917.
 Woodcut, 38 x 27.2 cm.
 Museum Folkwang, Essen

Egon Schiele,
 Poster for the exhibition in the Arnot
 Gallery with Schiele as St. Sebastian,
 1914-1915
 Gouache, black crayon and ink on
 cardboard, 67 x 50 cm.
 Wien Museum, Vienna.

Marc and Kandinsky met on New Year's Eve of 1910-1911 and struck up a close and mutually inspirational friendship. They worked towards a kind of abstraction that went far beyond the rational analysis and synthesis of the material world found in Cubism at around the same time. In Kandinsky's *Improvisation 19*, which the artist also titled *Blauer Klang* (Blue Sound), colour and line have become independent of one another (p.98). New revelations from the exploratory physics of Einstein and the psychoanalysis of Freud seemed only to heighten the mysteriousness of existence and the ineffable magnitude of the universe. Drawing on a rich range of ancient and modern cultural sources as well as on the most radical contemporary art, literature and music, their paintings were laden with pantheistic, spiritual, prophetic and mythical content. Looking at Marc's animal paintings, Däubler wrote: "A kind of possession comes to life in the artist, as at a witches' Sabbath". Their aspirations for art itself were zealous. In his essay "The 'Savages' of Germany", published in the *Blaue Reiter* almanach, Marc called both on the martial instinct and the intellect

"In our epoch of the great struggle for the new art we fight like disorganised 'savages' against an old, established power. The battle seems to be unequal; but in spiritual matters it is not the numbers that triumph, rather the power of ideas. The dreaded weapons of the 'savages' are their *new ideas*; new ideas kill better than steel and destroy what was thought to be indestructible"

An idea cherished by Kandinsky and Marc was that of an approaching new epoch, a new age of the spiritual, to overcome the decadent, apathetic and cynical age of the material. Kandinsky's long essay *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (Concerning the Spiritual in Art) was published at the end of 1911. Its dramatic closing statement declares

"We see before us an age of purposeful creation, and this spirit in painting stands in a direct, organic relationship to the creation of a new spiritual realm that is already beginning, for this spirit is the soul of the *epoch of the great spiritual*".

Along with many others of their generation, Kandinsky and Marc believed that a great upheaval, a process of destruction, was necessary in order to cleanse and make way for creation and renewal. Kandinsky, Münter, Jawlensky and their friends all read theosophical texts, such as Rudolf Steiner's *Theosophie*. During the pre-war period, Steiner too was prophesying that a new realm would come after a period of chaos. He pointed to the apocalyptic Revelations of St John as its most potent metaphor. The dynamic of creation emerging from destruction could be found in Nietzsche's philosophy and in countless poems of the period. These kinds of ideas were immensely seductive. They help to explain why so many idealistic young artists and writers joined in the widespread enthusiasm for war in 1914. They pinned their hopes for radical change and society's re-birth, naïvely, on violence and destruction. It also sheds light on a recurring theme in Marc's and Kandinsky's work in the immediate pre-war years – Apocalypse.

From 1910, images from The Last Judgment such as trumpeting angels, gathered saints with the dead rising from their graves, the horsemen of the apocalypse and general catastrophe can be found repeatedly in Kandinsky's work. They appear in several glass paintings and on canvases, some clearly figurative, others more abstract

EGON SCHIELE



GALERIE ARNOT
JANUAR 1955-5-1-K



Wassily Kandinsky,
Improvisation 19, 1911.
 Oil on canvas, 120 x 141.5 cm.
 Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
 Munich.

In *Allerheiligen II* (All Saints Day II) of 1911, Kandinsky draws on St John's description of the thousand-year reign of Christ with the saints and prophets following the awakening of the dead. Trumpeting angels throng the skies. Mountain-top cities appear to buckle. Saints and prophets kneel or look in awe to the skies. At the top of the canvas the prophet Elijah rides in a chariot across the skies in an image that draws on traditional representations in Russian icons and folk prints. Just below him, another Russian saint, St Vladimir, crowned, stares heavenwards. He brandishes a cross and Russian church towers in his hands.

During 1912, Kandinsky began to explore the theme of the deluge. He titled the works with the German word "*Sintflut*" (Deluge) to emphasise that the biblical flood was meant, as opposed to a more prosaic "*Flut*" (Flood). A large abstract painting, *Komposition VI* (Composition VI) of 1913 can be traced to "Deluge" studies. Without any specific figurative



content, the surging, crashing forms and agitated diagonals all suggest tumult and catastrophe.

In 1913, Marc painted a major work, drawing on the violence of an imagined natural apocalypse. He gave it a strange title, "The Trees showed their Rings, the Animals their Veins" and inscribed the back with a Buddhist phrase "And All Being is Flaming Suffering". It became known as *Tierschicksale* (Fate of the Animals), a title suggested to Marc by his friend Klee (p 99). It was shown at that year's most important avant-garde exhibition, the *Erste deutsche Herbstsalon* (First German Autumn Salon) organised by Walden at the Sturm gallery. Technically sophisticated and drawing on a range of contemporary influences including Italian Futurism, the painting is an image of paradise rent asunder by the forces of a cosmic cataclysm. Green horses are whipped into panic under a bleeding tree. Pink boars seek shelter in the undergrowth. And a blue deer rears up, graceful in agony at the centre of the apocalyptic drama.

Franz Marc,
Fate of the Animals, 1913
Oil on canvas, 196 x 266 cm.
Kunstmuseum, Basel.



While Marc was serving at the Front in 1915, he received a postcard from his friend and patron Bernhard Koehler. It showed a reproduction of *Tierschicksale* (Fate of the Animals). Marc reacted with shock (p.99). The next day he wrote to his wife:

“Koehler wrote to me today on a Sturm postcard of my ‘Fate of the Animals.’ At first glance I was completely shaken. It is like a premonition of this war, terrifying and gripping; I can hardly believe that I painted it! In the hazy photograph in any case its effect is so unbelievably truthful that it’s uncanny”.

It was the fate of the painting itself to face destruction. After Marc was killed in the war in 1916, a memorial exhibition was mounted at the Sturm gallery to honour the painter who was now seen as the greatest lost talent of the Expressionist generation. One night a fire broke out in the gallery’s storage area and partially destroyed the canvas. The damage to the right side of the canvas can still be clearly seen. Klee undertook the restoration of the picture in 1919. He did it in such a way that a veil of brown appears to hang over the damaged area. In this way, the destructive damage suffered by the artwork echoes the destruction represented as the animals’ “fate”. In 1937 Marc’s painting was declared “degenerate” and confiscated by the Nazis. Because the regime was aware of the painting’s value on the international market, it survived complete destruction by burning – the fate of some 5,000 other artworks – and was bought by the art museum in Basel.

In 1914, the Deutsche Werkbund, a reformative organisation of designers and manufacturers, staged an exhibition in Cologne on the banks of the Rhine in Deutz, looking across to the mighty cathedral. One of the most spectacular exhibits was a crystalline structure that can be seen as an early example of Expressionist architecture. This was Bruno Taut’s *Glashaus* (Glass House). The visitor to the polychrome temple could pass up and down stairs in the interior, shot through with myriad hues of light from the coloured glass. There was a cascade of water inside, gushing with connotations of purification and cleansing. Within Expressionism there was something approaching a cult of the crystalline. The crystal appeared to a whole generation of mystically-inclined Expressionists to embody with perfect purity the synthesis of art and nature. This, and the more prosaic input from the German glass industry, came together in Taut’s temple to industry, design, poetry, light, colour and world harmony. The *Glashaus* incorporated the ecstatic and crystal-orientated lyrics of Paul Scheerbart, such as in inscriptions around the structure’s exterior. One phrase read “*Das bunte Glas zerstört den Hass*” (Coloured Glass Destroys Hatred). Barely had the *Glashaus* been built, than the conflagration of the First World War erupted in Europe.

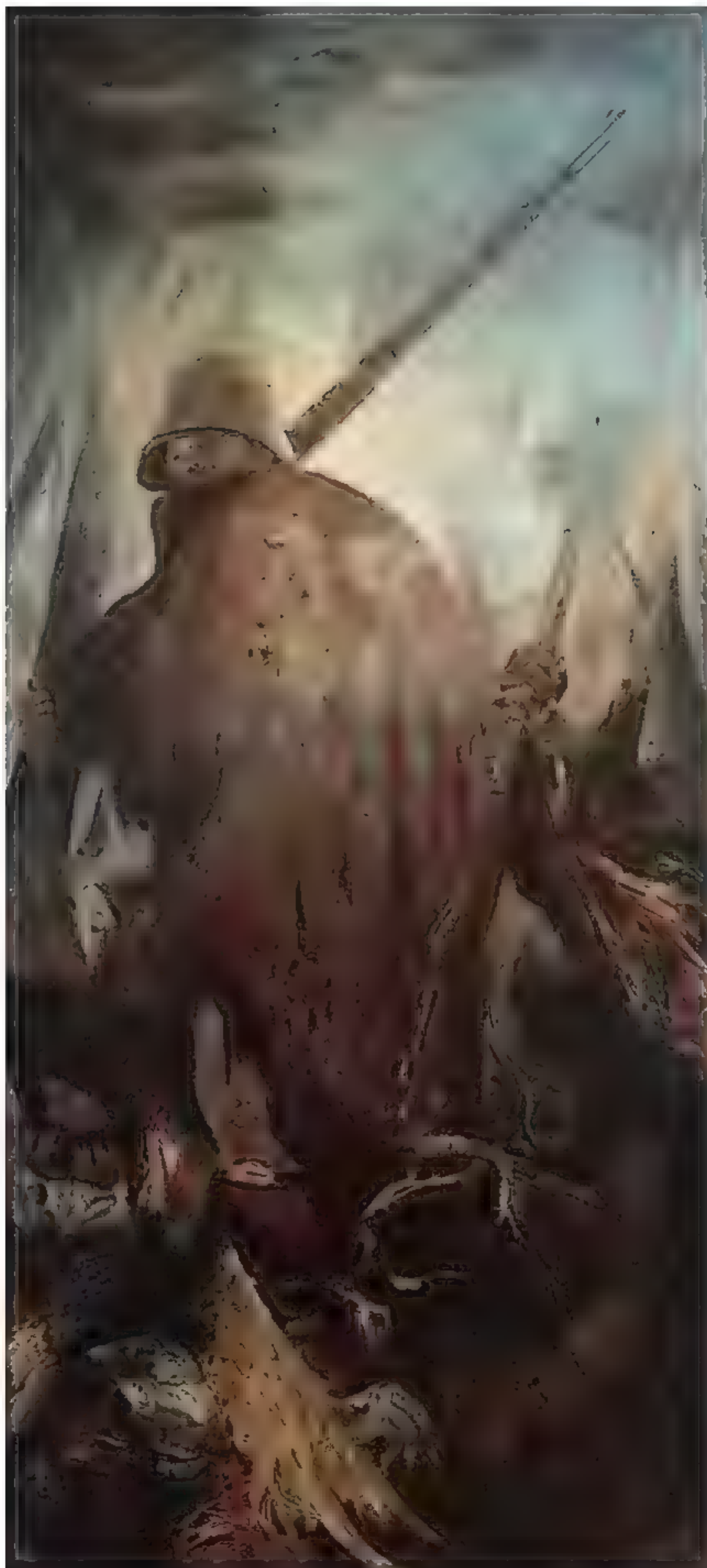
Expressionism’s emphasis on the absolute superiority of “inner” over “outer” vision, its hopes for an “inner revolution”, its embrace of the apocalyptic and ultimately, its irrationalism, paved the way for crushing disillusionment. In the face of a seemingly endless and pointless war, these features of Expressionism later led critics of many political hues to accuse some of its artists and writers of a reactionary retreat, inwards, from ground-level politics and from the “real” revolution. The following chapter considers some of the Expressionist responses to war. It also looks at the movement’s development in the context of the political upheaval, from empire to republic, which came in the war’s aftermath.

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff,

Phansees, 1912

Oil on canvas, 75.9 x 102.9 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



WAR AND REVOLUTION

When war broke out in Europe in the summer of 1914, four years of battle and years more of devastating crises lay ahead. One of Marc's paintings that articulates a grim anticipation of war and foresees its origins in South-Eastern Europe was *Das arme Land Tirol* (The Unfortunate Land of Tirol) of 1913. In the same year he painted a pack of wolves and subtitled the work *Balkankrieg* (Balkan War). Ernst Barlach sculpted a furious, hurtling avenging angel just as the hostilities commenced. Yet in spite of a tide of apocalyptic prophecies, few could imagine the cold reality of modern, technological warfare, in "this endless, loveless war" as Marc was calling it by 1915 in a letter from the Front. By the end of the war, Germany's military casualties alone totalled an estimated 1,600,000 dead and 4,000,000 wounded. Yet, in 1914, as in other countries, Germany's citizens had been gripped by a wave of excitement – whether patriotic or merely adventure-hungry – and enthusiasm for the war. Marinetti had already proclaimed "War – the world's only hygiene", and his band of Futurists campaigned in Italy to join the war that began without them. Men and boys fell over themselves to volunteer. No-one knew then either that Germany would leave the conflict so fractious and embittered that its citizens would continue a kind of civil war for years within its borders.

This chapter looks at Expressionist responses to war and its aftermath in Germany. It investigates representations of military life, combat and death. It also considers the political and aesthetic dilemmas faced by artists after war finally ended late in 1918 and the so-called November Revolution ushered in a fragile and flawed republic. This was a period in which many artists' lives were profoundly altered, if not shattered by war. For many, Expressionism's Nietzschean embrace of violence as a life-force, its ecstatic explosiveness, pathos, bombast, political naivety and self-centred subjectivity now appeared immature, at best. By 1919, there was widespread talk of the "death of Expressionism". It was in the context of the First World War that the most biting critique of Expressionism emerged from within Expressionism's own ranks – Dada (as the final chapter will show).

Dix was one of the most prolific artists of war. He was also a prodigious soldier. He served on both the Western and Eastern Fronts, throughout wartime, and was awarded the Iron Cross. In the latter months of the war he trained as a pilot. Dix took two books with him into battle: the Bible and a volume of Nietzsche. While he was embroiled in the drudgery and the danger of war, Dix was most fascinated with the scenery of destruction – his small paintings and drawings were of the blasted battlefields more often than the human experience of war. However, when the fighting had been over for some years, he returned to the subject and his memories of it. He produced a masterly graphic cycle, *Der Krieg* (The War), in 1924 in the tradition of Goya's *Disasters of War*. He painted monumental panels in the 1920s and early 1930s in the manner of medieval altarpieces. Taken together, this wide range of works encompasses a richness and diversity of war experience from the horrific to the banal, the tragic to the absurd.



Otto Dix,

War in the Trenches.

Oil on paper, 28.5 x 28.9 cm.

Zeppelin Museum Friedrichshafen,
Friedrichshafen.

Käthe Kollwitz,

No More War, 1924.

Lithograph, 93.5 x 71 cm.

Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche
Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.

Dix painted himself as a soldier several times. In his 1914 self-portrait (on the reverse of which is another self-portrait, in a spiked artillery helmet), he appears as a pugnacious, thuggish figure, painted in the reds of the planet Mars – planet of war. His shaven head, thrusting forwards, is all male strength and carnal brutality. “14 DIX” marks the date and subject like a tattoo, piece of graffiti or a serial number. The effect of powerful physicality is doubly dramatised in the thick, gestural marks of the brush and smeared paint on paper. It is interesting to consider the image in terms of its masculinity and the concentrated manliness of war itself. The letter in which Marc spoke of the “endless, loveless war” was written to Elisabeth Macke, wife and now widow of Marc’s close friend, the painter August Macke. Marc wrote to her, of the past few months at the Front:

“... my thoughts were actually in some kind of nowhere, restless, unproductive, full of hatred for this war; and what is especially uncanny about this state is: I’m becoming a better soldier! Often I don’t recognise myself; we men are a curious sex. Unfortunately, the war masculinises us even more; I can barely even imagine you women any more . . .”

An image of undifferentiated and undecorated masculinity in war came from Kirchner in 1915. In his *Artillerymen*, a crowd of naked soldiers, thin, sallow and strangely vulnerable are bombarded by steely jets of water from the communal shower (p.113). The officer to the right in uniform and jack-boots creates a presence that both emphasises the mens’ nakedness, stripped of military regalia, and underlines these soldiers’ complete subjugation to authority.

In war, the natural landscape was ripped and shattered. As the combat dragged on over years, the Front became a mass of muddied trenches, blasted tree stumps, wire and rotting corpses. The British artist Paul Nash produced haunting images of the battlefields, where they appear almost as lunar landscapes. But Dix surveyed the battleground differently. He noted his impressions in his war diary with the curious mixture of horror and detachment that can also be detected in his paintings and drawings of war:

“Lice, rats, tangled wire, fleas, grenades, bombs, craters, corpses, blood, schnapps, mice, cats, gases, cannons, filth, bullets, mortars, fire, steel, that is war! All the work of the devil!”

In a 1917 gouache by Dix of the battlefield, signal flares like fireworks light up the night sky and the tangle of corpses and wire, giving the scene a grisly festivity

In an interview in 1968, Dix reflected on his war service, “the hunger, the fear, the shutting one’s pants”. As to why he volunteered, he said emphatically that he had to see war with his own eyes:

“I also had to experience for myself what it is like when someone next to you falls down dead ... I had to experience it totally and utterly. I wanted to. So I’m certainly not a pacifist after all. Or maybe I was a curious person. I had to see it all for myself. I’m such a realist”.

Numerous artists and writers volunteered for war, but not always in the same spirit. Beckmann volunteered for service as a medical orderly in order to avoid going into armed combat. He too was fascinated by war at the outset, but according to a friend, he said: “I’m not going to shoot at the French, I have learnt so much from them. Nor at the Russians, Dostoyevski is my friend”.

Kollwitz was a committed pacifist. She dreamt of Socialism as the answer to Europe’s suffering. Her son Peter was killed in the fighting. Mourning his death and the loss of

George Grosz,
Cup, 1919-1920
Offset sheet of “Ecce Homo”,
24.2 x 19.1 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin
Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Schlemihl Alone in his Room, 1915
Woodcut in colour, 33 x 23.5 cm.
Kunstmuseum, Basel

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Wind from the Shadows, 1915
Coloured woodcut, 28.2 x 21.9 cm.
Kunstmuseum, Basel









millions of others, Kollwitz came to see the war years not only as “unspeakably hard” but also as a “terrible deception”. After the war, inspired by the example of her friend and colleague Barlach, she created a moving cycle of seven woodcuts, titled *Der Krieg* (The War). They focus on the bereavement and suffering inflicted on ordinary people in war. In the second of them, *Die Freiwilligen* (The Volunteers), she envisages a surging crowd of young volunteers and the suffering, howling women from whom they are being pulled, inexorably towards destruction, by death as a drummer.

Twenty years after the outbreak of the First World War, John Heartfield, one-time Dadaist and creator of biting effective political photomontages, sounded the alarm at the dangers to another generation of the enthusiasm for war. A photograph of a young troop of boy-soldiers being drilled for a coming war is juxtaposed with the dead of 1914, ranked behind a military general. Heartfield published it in the anti-Nazi workers’ magazine, the *AIZ* (*Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*) with the slogan “*Nach zwanzig Jahren*” (Twenty Years Later!)

In 1915 Lehmbruck created a monumental sculpture that, for many viewers, came to symbolise the crushing futility of war. *Der Gesturzte* (The Fallen Man) is a massive, elongated and over-life-size male nude. On first showing to the public, at the Freie Sezession exhibition of 1916, it was called “The Dying Warrior”. In its origins it may have been related to the legend of Siegfried – Lehmbruck worked on it around the time he was considering entering a competition for a Siegfried monument and war memorial in his native city of Duisburg. In the midst of war, what outraged some viewers about the work was also what moved others. This was nothing like the patriotic, idealised sculptures of upright, heroic warriors. Lehmbruck’s figure, naked and fallen, monumentalises defeat. Many viewers have seen its eloquence in the sense of the figure poised on an existential cusp. This massive warrior, the fragment of a broken sword still in one hand, is captured at the moment of relinquishing life while still resisting death.

Georg Trakl’s last poem, “Groddek”, draws on the poet’s experiences with his medical unit in Poland and describes death in the landscape of war:

The evening hears the autumnal woods speaking
Of deadly weapons, the golden plains
And blue lakes, above them the sun
Rolls murkily down; the night surrounds
Dying warriors, the wild complaint
Of their broken mouths . . .

A German postcard from the war period has an image of a soldier’s sweetheart cheekily wearing his helmet on horseback. It is combined with a slightly risqué ditty about *Reitermut* or “rider’s courage”. Its reverse reveals that it was sent on 22 November 1916 from a British soldier on active service to a woman in Cheltenham, England. He writes: “I thought you would like this P.C. – it was taken from a German captured in the recent advances”. The cheerful image makes for a grim contrast with the etchings in Dix’s monumental *Krieg* (War) cycle.

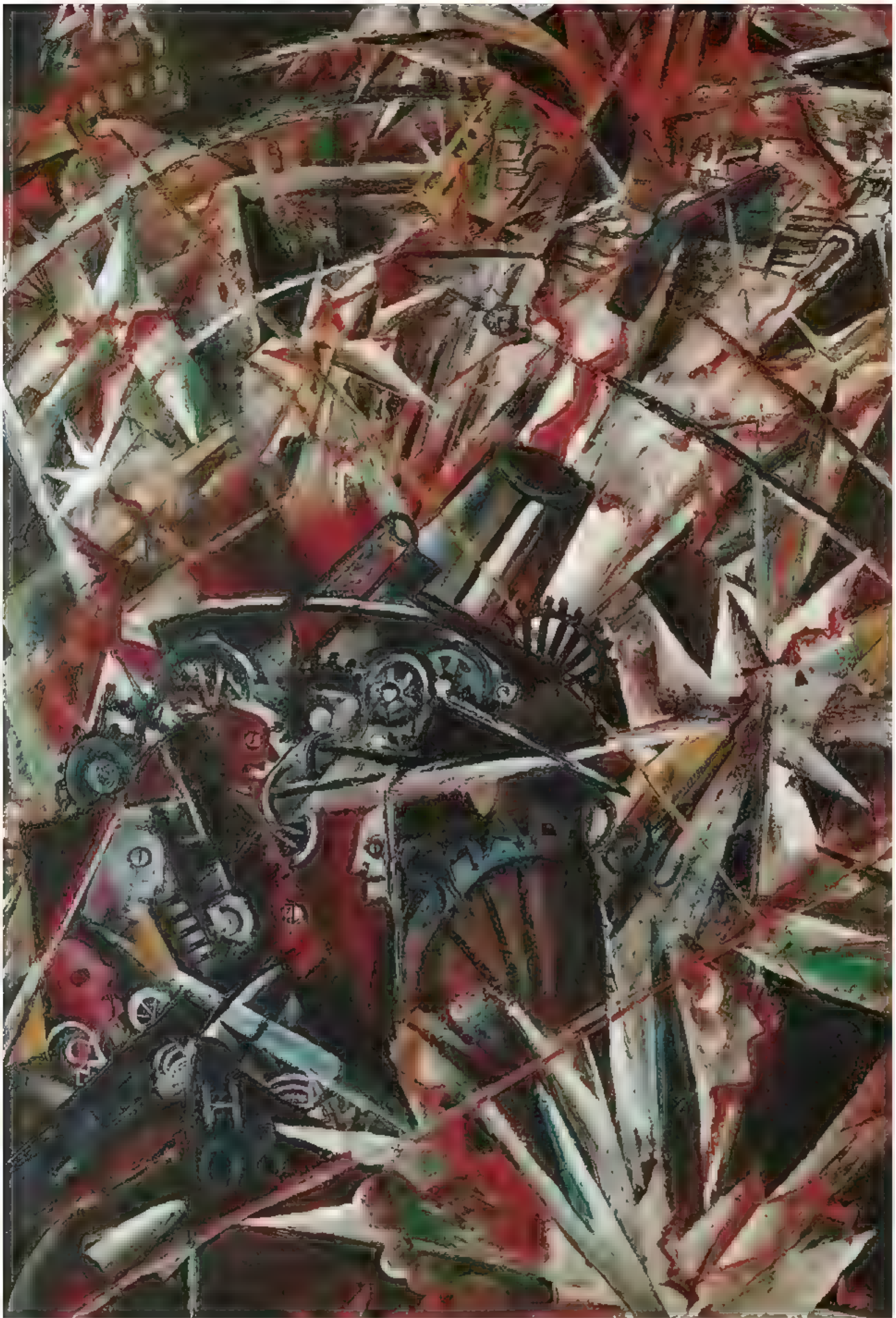
Grosz despised the war. Refusing to blame it only on the ruling classes, he reviled too, the mass hysteria that had fuelled it. He suffered a mental breakdown as a result of the horrors he witnessed and lived in terror of re-conscription. His bitterly ironic drawing, *KV: The Faith Healers* is a damning indictment of the insanity of war, the inhumanity of the bureaucratic

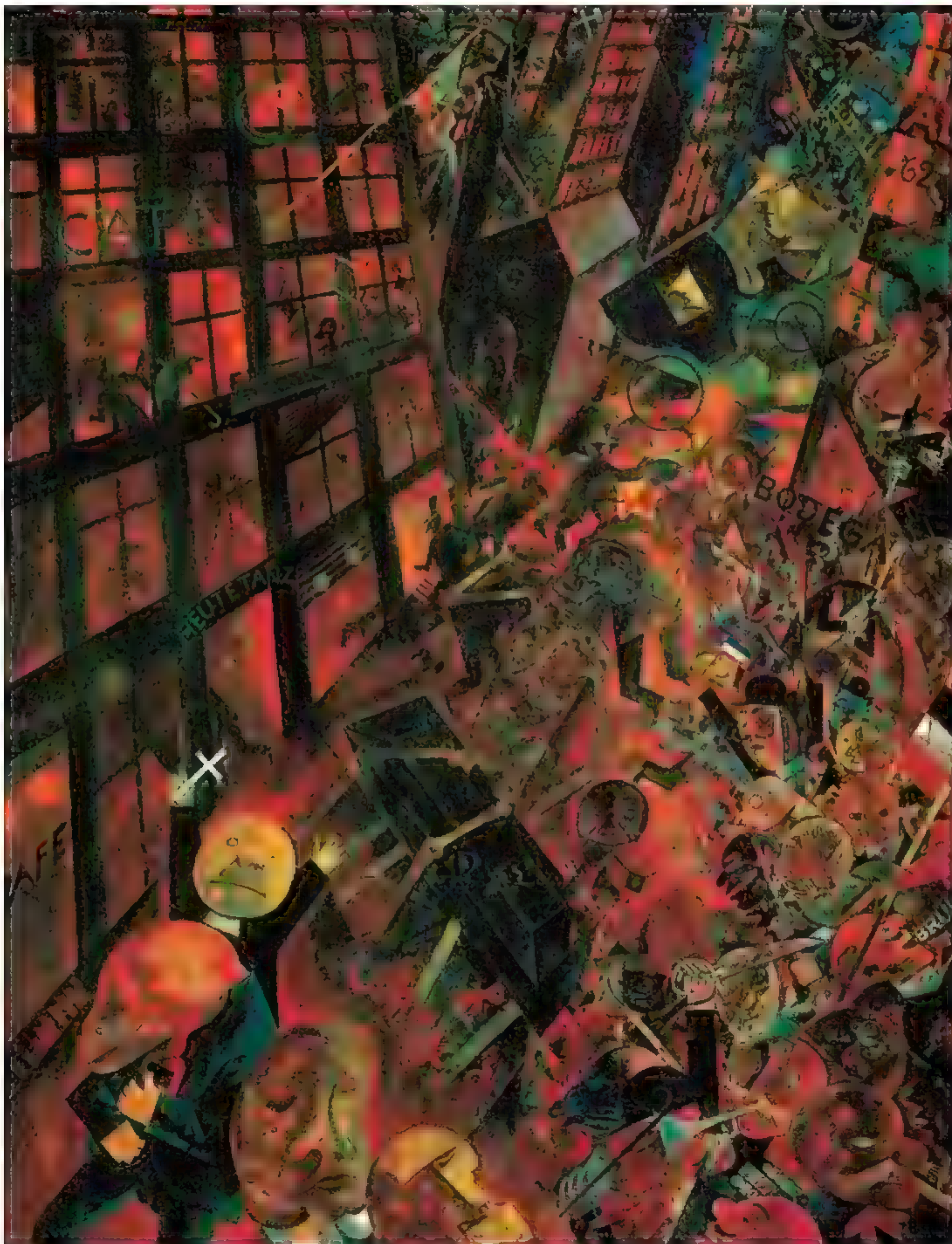


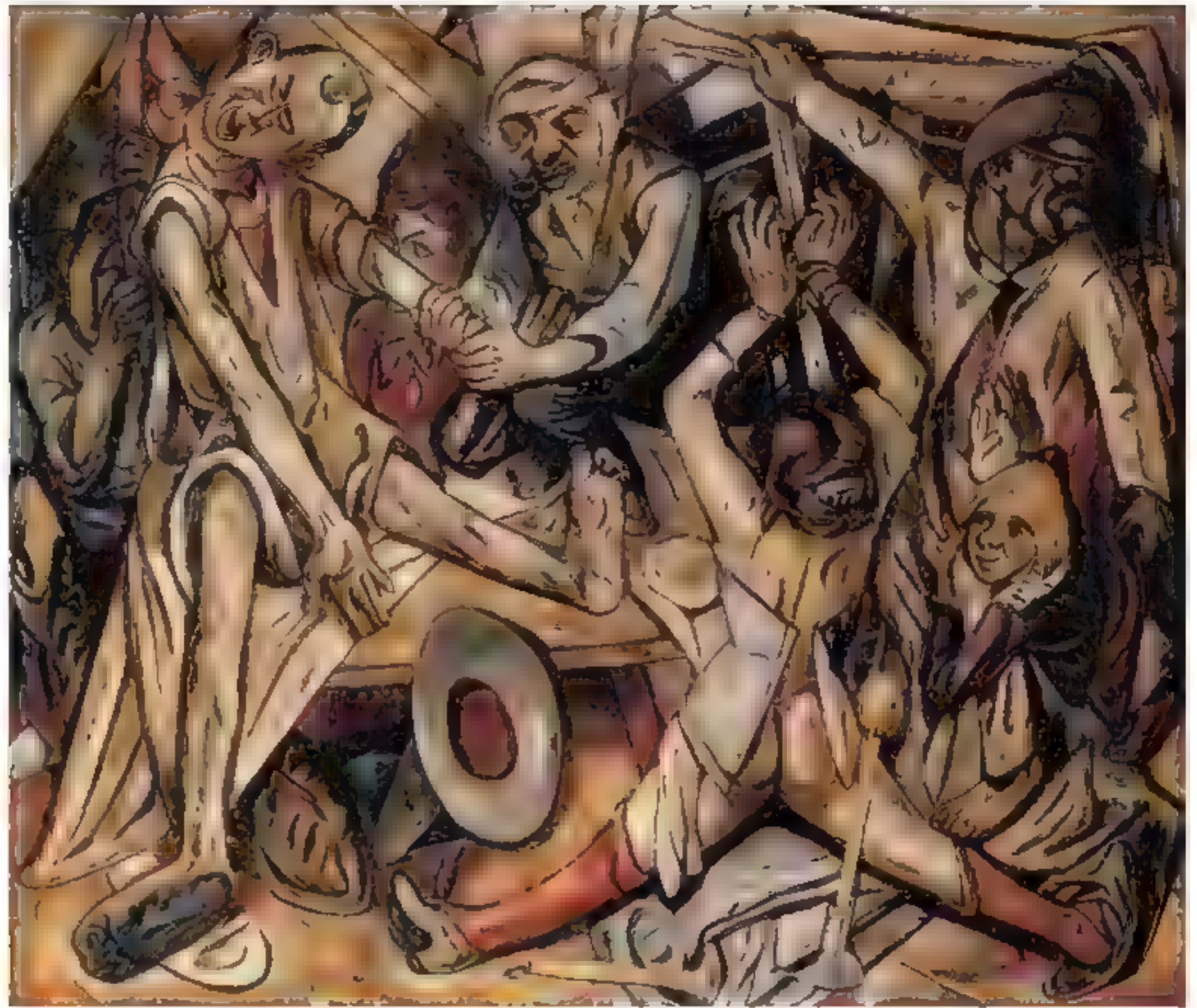
Otto Dix,
Memory of the Mirrored Halls of Brussels,
1920

Oil on canvas, 124 x 80.4 cm.
Musée national d’art moderne,
Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris.

Otto Dix,
Me in Brussels, 1922.
Watercolour and pencil on paper,
49 x 36.8 cm
Otto Dix Stiftung, Vaduz.





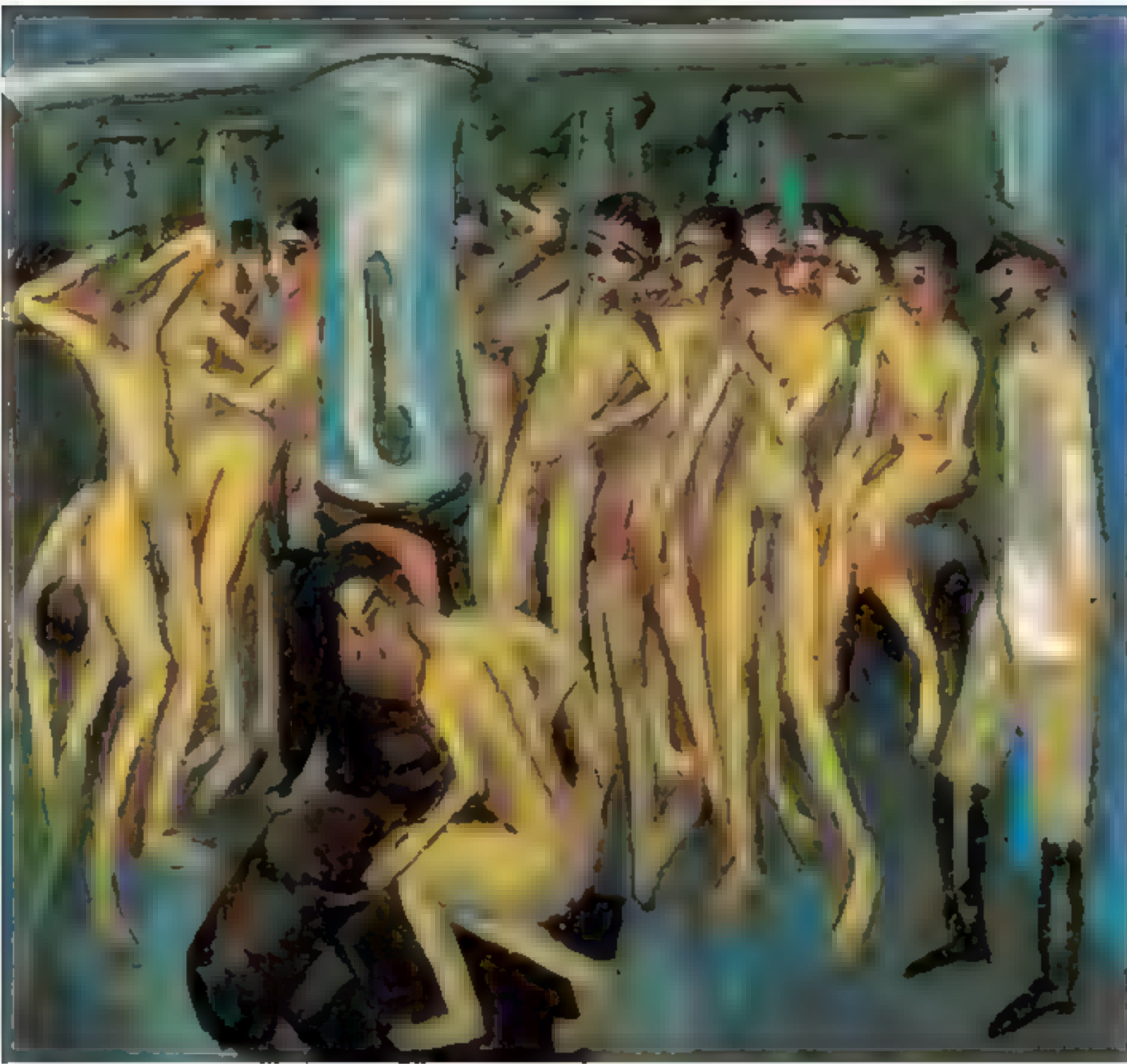


war machine, and the absurdity of its processes. A jovial military doctor examines a bespectacled corpse, already in a state of advanced decay. His pronouncement is "KV", "*kriegsverwendungsfähig*", or "fit for active service". With his characteristic economy of line and sharpness of wit, Grosz lines up for ridicule all the figures that embody the worst of military culture. Flat-headed generals enjoy a joke and a cigar in the foreground, ignoring the examination. Meek desk-bound pen-pushers record and officiate the process. Of the two figures standing obediently, upright to attention, the medical orderly embodies with his clipboard petty bureaucracy, the armed soldier thuggish brute force

Otto Dix,
The War (Artillery), 1914.
Oil on cardboard, 98 x 69 cm.
Stiftung Museum Kunst Palast,
Dusseldorf

George Grosz,
Homage to Oskar Panizza, 1917-1919.
Oil on canvas, 114 x 110 cm.
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart.
Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY

After the war was over, Dix depicted the officer ranks of the German army as degenerate and animalistic. In *Memories of the Mirrored Halls in Brussels*, a flushed, decorated soldier gropes a fleshy, falsely smiling prostitute (p. 108). Dix exploits the disorientating, kaleidoscopic effects of a chamber that is mirrored on all sides – including floor and ceiling – for several purposes. The mirror facets reflect from multiple angles the different stages and positions of their erotic wrestling. The general appears to be drinking a toast, in self-congratulation, to his own reflection. The overall sense of lurching, toppling and disequilibrium also effectively conveys the drunkenness of the night. The extraordinary setting is very likely based on the mirrored brothels that sprang up in Belgian towns during the war, under German occupation, including the most famous in Brussels, which catered for the sexual whims of officers – not ordinary foot-soldiers. Stylistically, the fragmented, montage effect here is related to Dix's contact, at the time, with the Dadaists in Berlin.



In a watercolour titled like a holiday souvenir snapshot, *Me in Brussels*, Dix depicted himself as a soldier; cigarette clamped in mouth and with hot red gaze fixed intently on the ample buttocks of a prostitute (p.109). He pursues her into the inviting light of a brothel. In his written notes and in interviews Dix often underlined what he saw as the essential link between the drives to sex and to war.

Later, in post-war Germany, he also came to see the fate of the male war cripple and the female prostitute as a shared one.

Grosz emerged from mental hospital in 1917, convinced that his epoch was sinking ever farther into destruction. He created a spectacular visual testimony to this presentiment in a scene of medieval, nocturnal horror on the streets of modern Berlin. It is a carnival of sex, death and drunkenness. This was his *Hidmung an Oskar Panizza* (Homage to Oskar Panizza) of 1917-1918 (p.111). The painting also testifies to Grosz's unique ability to convey madness and utter havoc within a tightly structured composition. The sharp diagonals and rushing perspective of the scene are expressive of violent chaos and symbolically, of the fateful dynamism and velocity of a civilisation hurtling into the abyss. Grosz wrote to his friend Schmalhausen:

"At the moment I am painting a giant picture of Hell – a gin lane of the grotesque dead and lunatics, there's a lot happening in it – the devil himself rides sideways on a coffin through the picture down to the left, on the right a youngster retches and vomits all the wonderful illusions of youth into the canvas – I've dedicated the picture to Oskar Panizza. A swarm of possessed human animals . . ."

Max Beckmann,
The Night, 1918-1919
 Oil on canvas, 133 x 154 cm.
 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,
 Dusseldorf

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Artillerymen, 1915.
 Oil on canvas, 140 x 150.2 cm
 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
 New York.

The dedication was fitting. Panizza was a psychiatrist and writer best known for his anti-clerical, violent and sexually explicit satire – quickly banned – *Liebeskonzil* (Council of Love). Panizza was charged with blasphemy and other offences against public morality. In an effort to control his iconoclasm, he was committed to a lunatic asylum in 1904. He was still incarcerated at the time Grosz painted his ironic tribute, unleashing all the unruly forces of Panizza's rebellious work onto the painted streets.

In November 1918, two poems by Grosz were published. They appeared with an essay by his supporter, Däubler. Fragmented images of madness, intoxication and death, as if direct from his Panizza vision, surround Grosz himself.

*Ach gaudy world, you insane asylum,
You blissful cabinet of abnormalities
Watch out! Here comes Grosz!
The saddest man in Europe
Horrid!
By the whiskers of Professor Wotan –
In the afternoon bordered sewers,
Freshly painted decay,
Perfumed stench –
Grosz smells it.
Parbleu! It smells of fried children here.*

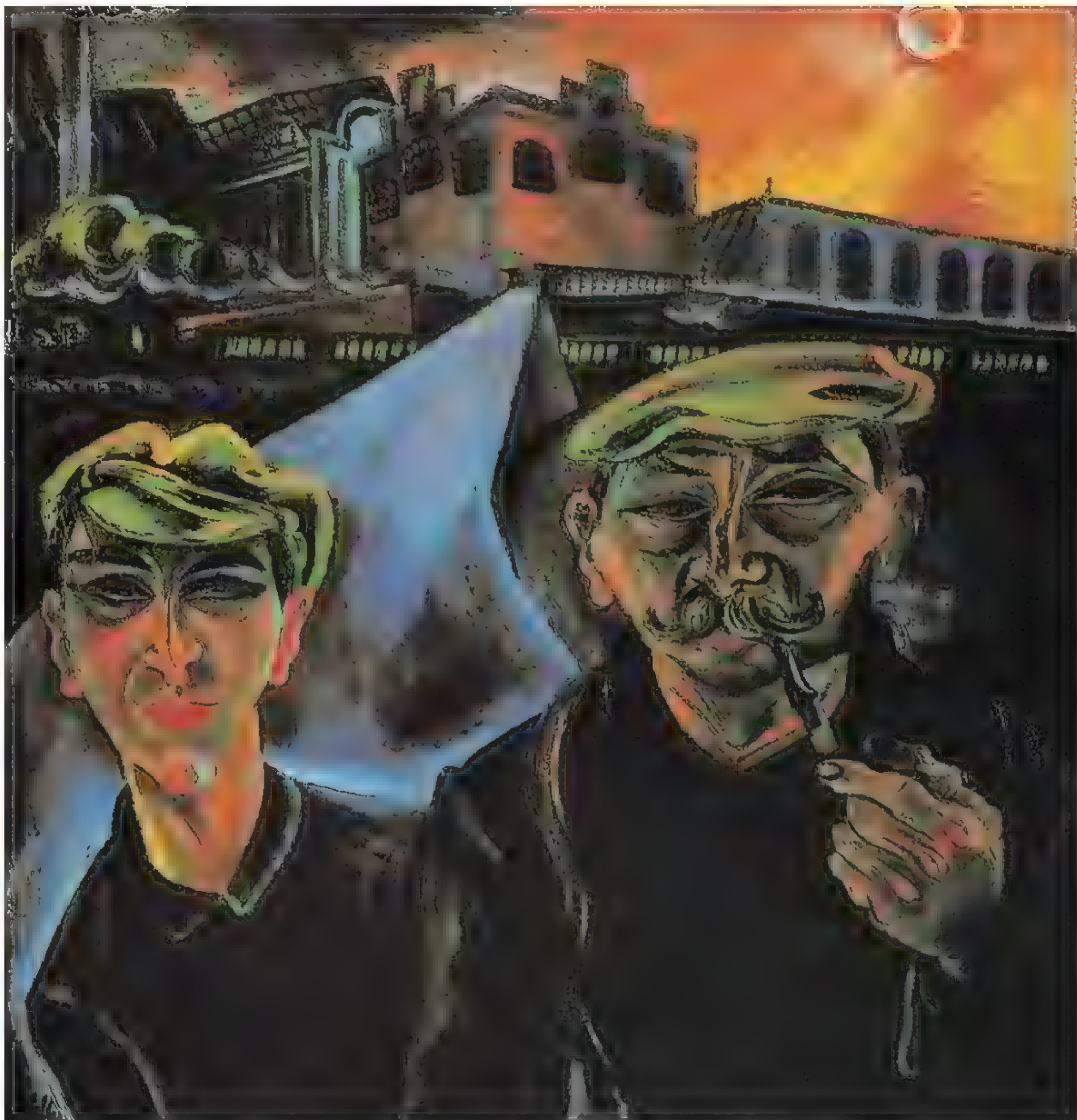
Not long after the war was over, Grosz began to appear on the streets of Berlin dressed as Death. It was a gesture entirely in keeping with his propensity for role-play, but also with the spirit of his paintings and poetry.

Within just a few days at the end of October and the beginning of November 1918, the events that brought the end of Germany as a monarchy unfolded in quick succession. Marines mutinied at Kiel naval base. Soldiers' councils from several bases formed in revolt against their commanders and seized garrisons. Kurt Eisner, of the Independent Socialists, led a coup in Munich on 7 November and announced the establishment of a Bavarian Republic. Philipp Scheidemann of the SPD (Social Democrats) declared the German Republic on 9 November. Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated and went into exile in Holland. Karl Liebknecht of the Spartacists issued a competing claim to revolution. Germany signed the armistice that ended the First World War on 11 November. The "November Revolution" however, was flawed from the start. The Left in Germany was fractured – the SPD struggled to smooth a peaceful transition to a people's state and a new National Assembly. Ultimately, the following year, the new Republic had to be inaugurated in the Thuringian town of Weimar; Berlin was too volatile. The radical Left, represented in Germany by the Independent Socialists (USPD), the Spartacists, and soon, by the new German Communist Party (KPD), looked to the Russian example and longed for "real" revolution.

Some Expressionists became directly involved in politics. Grosz joined the KPD. Others, such as Meidner and Pechstein supported the more moderate SPD. Cesar Klein made a poster for the SPD. In the new colours of the Republic – red, black and gold – its hopeful imagery and slogans were designed to promote peaceful unity and support for the new National Assembly to

Otto Dix,
Skat Players, 1920
Oil on canvas with photomontage and
collage, 110 x 85 cm.
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin



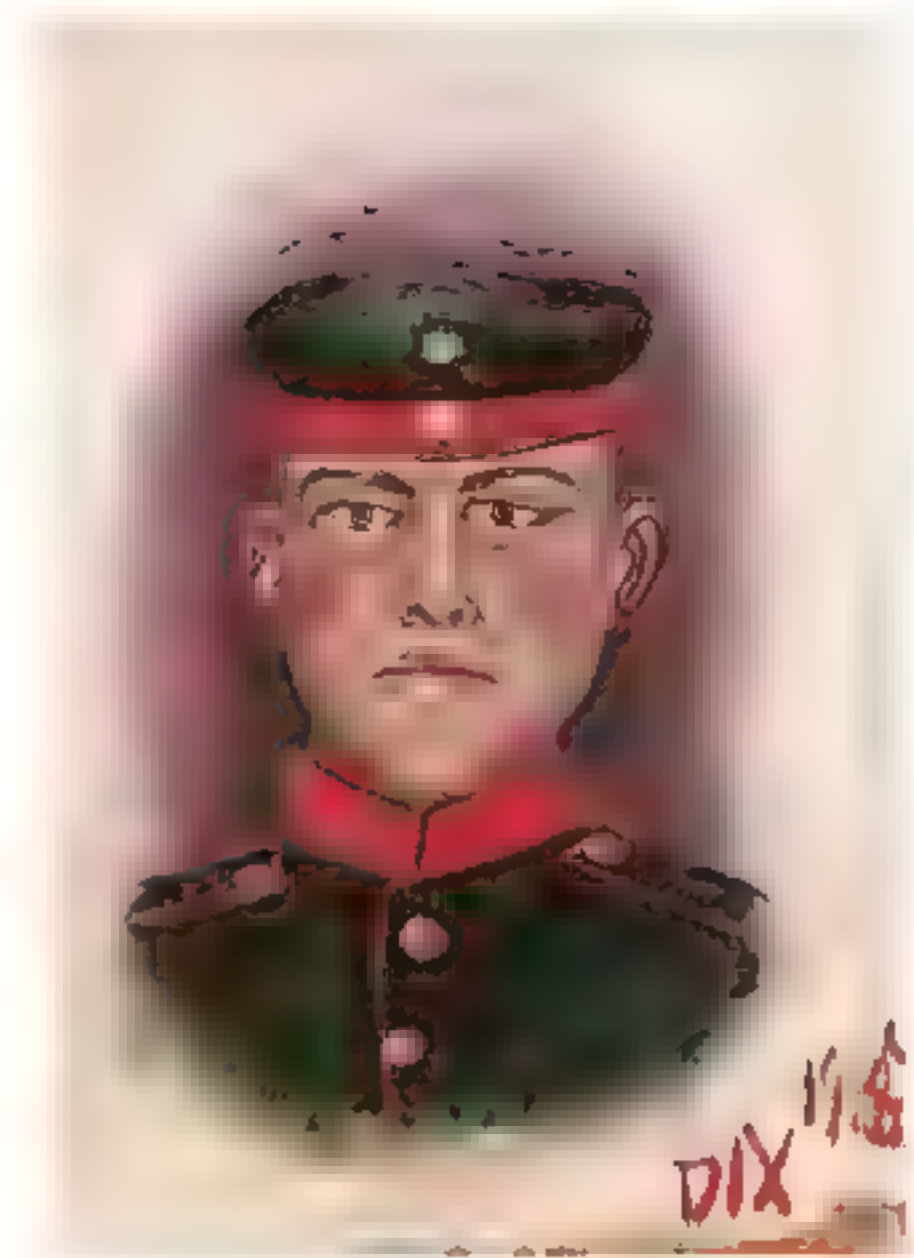


be led by the new Chancellor, Friedrich Ebert, and to quell revolutionary fighting. Expressionist journals such as Franz Pfemfert's *Die Aktion* were committed to revolution, yet at the same time, they wielded little real political influence. The reality was that the Communist and Spartacist movement had little time or interest for Expressionism. This was made clear by the fact that the Spartacist (later KPD) newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) contained no essays on art at all. It is also clear that many Expressionists were simply intoxicated by "revolution" in the vague sense of a feeling of upheaval, idealism and new beginning. This has been seen – negatively – as a kind of Expressionist "metapolitics" in which revolution was an abstract question of ethics rather than a material question of economic power or history.

Significantly, 1919 was the year in which the number of German Expressionist journals in circulation reached its peak (forty-four of them). Artists, architects and writers began to organise. The two main groups to emerge in 1918–1919 were the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* (Workers' Council for Art,) of which the architect Walter Gropius was president for a time, and the *Novembergruppe* (November Group), organised by Pechstein and Klein. They issued manifestoes and made loud demands for a new central role for art and artists in the new society. When Gropius went on to found the Bauhaus in Weimar in April of that year, the "Founding Manifesto" of the school echoed many of the *Arbeitsrat's* aspirations. The woodcut image that accompanied its publication was a crystalline, soaring, Gothic cathedral, by Lyonel Feininger. This was a "Cathedral of Socialism". Its stars symbolise the utopian dream of uniting the arts – painting, sculpture and above all, architecture – in the benevolent spirit of Socialism.

But in early 1919 these groups' concerns may have rung hollow in the face of the bloody political struggles for control of Germany's fate. Disease, poverty, violence and starvation were spreading. In Berlin's streets, filling with embittered ex-soldiers returning from a lost war, fighting between political factions intensified. Revolutionary Communists fought right-wing nationalists and the supporters of the Ebert government. They barricaded streets and occupied key buildings. Beckmann showed a small band of the "last" revolutionaries barricaded against the government forces. This was one of his major series of ten large lithographs called *Hölle* (Hell). It is a cycle of tableaux casting the city of Berlin as a crazed hell on earth.

The threat to the new Republic that the revolutionaries posed fuelled the brutal forces of reaction embodied in the *Freikorps*. These paramilitary troops consisted mainly of ex-soldiers recently returned from the Front, faced with unemployment and brutalised by years of war and military life. They were politically conservative and as such, largely monarchist. However, the new government recognised in these angry bands of men a force that could be used against the revolutionaries. They were led by the Minister for Defence, Gustav Noske, and they had no qualms about murdering anyone even suspected of Communist activity. On 15 January 1919, in the wake of many uprisings, the leaders of the *Spartakusbund*, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were arrested, interrogated, beaten and murdered. Luxemburg's body was found several months later in Berlin's Landwehr canal. With their deaths, the revolutionary movement lost its greatest hope for leadership and gained its most enduring martyrs. Around 5,000 strikes took place in 1919. They were brutally crushed. A drawing by Grosz, *Ich dien*, ("I serve") was included in Grosz's anti-military portfolio, *Gott mit uns* (God with Us).



Conrad Felixmüller,
Workers on Their Way Home, 1921.
Oil on wood, 95 x 95 cm
Private collection.

Otto Dix,
Self-Portrait as Practice Target, 1914.
Oil on paper, 69.5 x 49.4 cm.
Otto Dix Stiftung, Vaduz.

The setting is Munich, but the carnage and brutality are the same. A bloated and disfigured corpse has been spat from the river. Another, female, bobs nearby. A piggish *Freikorps* thug looks on, relaxing nonchalantly with a cigar as around him, spring blooms.

The horror of the bitter fighting, political murder and torture in post-war Germany is both context and subject of the most sophisticated and original work on this theme to emerge from the period. Max Beckmann's *Die Nacht* (The Night) opens a window onto a domestic interior that has become a cold and deadly torture chamber (p.112). It is a bleak view of humanity. It is also historically specific – the painting is inscribed with the dates August 1918 – March 1919. Its iconography has its origins in Beckmann's drawings made in wartime operating theatres. Rejecting Expressionist fervour and bravura, Beckmann painted the scene in leaden, sickly, colours with surgical precision. In the year he began work on it, Beckmann wrote: "So the war draws to its sorry end. It hasn't changed anything of my idea of life, it only confirmed it". A man is strangled and hung by the neck. His palms and charred foot soles are turned outwards, as in depictions of Christ, displaying their stigmata. A woman with a bodice ripped and legs splayed collapses to the floor. One of the Weimar Republic's most trenchant analysts, Siegfried Kracauer wrote an article on Beckmann in 1921 in which he described the hellish effects of *Die Nacht*.

"Truly, the horsemen of the apocalypse are riding and mowing down the human race. Bloodlust creeps through the nights and instigates pogroms, in which men and women are slowly tortured to death with diabolical powers of inventiveness. The victims' whimpers of pain are drowned out by the hellish cacophony that is expelled from the blood-red gramophone trumpet ... the whole order of things is inverted ... But in the midst of the noise the executioners' apprentices busy themselves with complete quiet and impassivity. Little pipe in mouth, they strangle necks and dislocate limbs, as if these were perfectly normal tasks about which nothing further need be said".

The work has been justifiably compared with Picasso's *Guernica* – from another violent period in Europe's history – for its evocation of the barbaric cruelty of human conflict and the forces of suppression.

In a different response to the chaos of 1919, Kollwitz created a dignified and expressive memorial to Liebknecht with one of her best-known woodcuts. She based her image on the motif of the Lamentation of Christ, thereby emphasising to viewers the martyrdom of the Spartacists. Like so many of Kollwitz's works on the theme of death, the image focuses on the shared experience of the loss and bereavement of those left behind. Here, a group of workers gaze on the body of Liebknecht, mourning not only his death, but also the death of the longed-for revolution. The message of the memorial to 15 January 1919 is, as the inscription puts it, "From the living to the dead".

Highlighting again the range of work that the fluid and subjective term "Expressionism" could encompass, in contrast to the quiet monumentality of Kollwitz's woodcut is an abstract and dynamic canvas by Johannes Molzahn. The painting could be described as an example of German Futurism. The composition is shattered into shards of colour, as if from an explosion, in order to convey the revolutionary complex "idea – movement – struggle" following the inscription at the lower left of the canvas. In 1919, the inscription in

George Grosz,
The Agitator, 1928.
Oil on canvas, 108 x 81 cm
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY





that corner was longer. It continued "to you, Karl Liebknecht". Later, Molzahn over-painted the dedication. The year was 1933 and his action was a measure to protect himself from the Gestapo, who were already investigating him.

The heightened class-consciousness that the revolutionary period brought was a factor in the work of Conrad Felixmüller. In 1920, he was only twenty-three years old, studying in Dresden, when he won a prestigious art scholarship to go to Rome for two years. He asked for the money to finance a field trip to the industrial Ruhr district instead. There, in cities and towns such as Essen, Recklinghausen and Gelsenkirchen he made paintings and prints of the landscape of the coal-mining industry and its workers (p.116).

The area had also been the site of some of the bloodiest fighting and Felixmüller expressed his deep admiration for the *Rote Ruhr-Armee* (Red Ruhr Army) of workers who had fought against right-wing Putschists and *Freikorps* when they attempted a military coup in 1920. Wearing red armbands, they patrol the city night in his *Ruhrrevier II* (Ruhr District II).

In conclusion, we return to Dix. He produced two works, one at the start of the ill-fated Weimar Republic and one at its end, that both function in different ways as arguably some of the most powerful visual anti-war statements ever made. Dix's *Skat Players* of 1920 uses paint and collage to construct ironically and reveal unflinchingly three card-playing soldiers' shattered bodies (p.115). Their disfigured features are based on the photographs of horrifically maimed soldiers that were circulated by pacifist organisations and the Left press at this time. Millions of men returned from the Front injured, crippled or mutilated by war. In the work of Dix, Grosz and others, the figure of the war cripple functioned not as an object of pity, but as an accusation and a warning against militarism. Above all, he was a living sign of the bitter reality of war's after-effects.

In 1932, Dix was internationally recognised and was working as a professor at the Dresden Academy. There, he worked laboriously on a monumental triptych, *War*. The meticulous painting on wood, in the manner and the format of a Christian altarpiece, looks back to the memory – collective memory and Dix's own – of the First World War. More pressingly, in the face of growing support for the Nazis and resurgent militarism in Germany, it sounded another warning. In the left panel, soldiers depart for war, on a path analogous with the Road to Calvary.

In the centre panel an impaled corpse, pointing with an accusatory finger, echoes the Crucifixion. The scene on the right evokes both the hell-fires of a Bosch or a Brueghel and the Deposition. The predella, where the entombed Christ is usually depicted, shows sleeping soldiers. Thus, finally, the work's orchestrated correspondence with the iconography of the Passion lends it a universal and timeless significance as a lamentation on war.

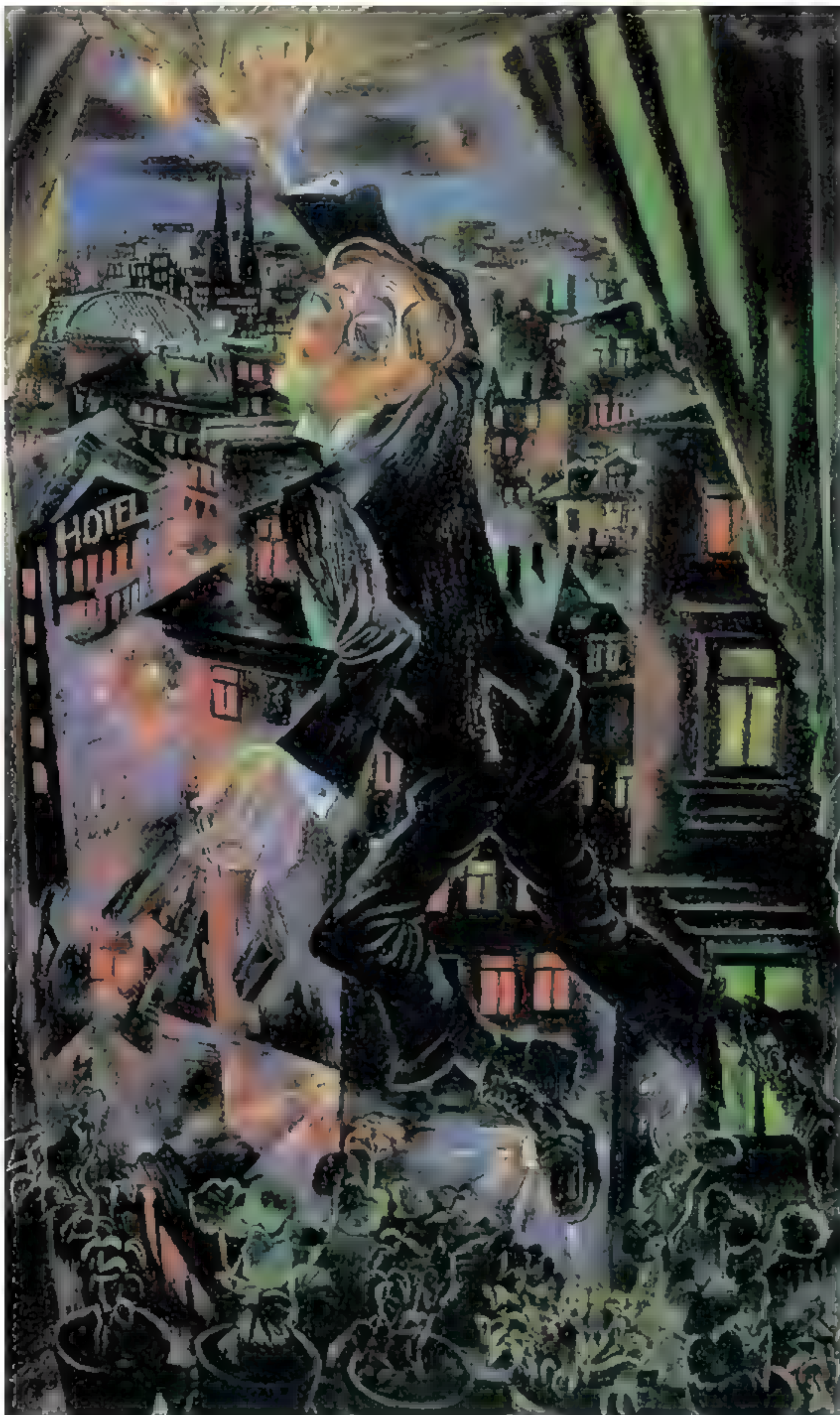
These two major works by Dix, separated by twelve years, are very different in technique. They both contain elements that can be traced to Expressionism and the movement's medieval and "primitive" roots. However, they both also testify to some of the doubts about the Expressionist mode of working with which many avant-garde artists grappled in the Weimar period. *Skat Players* shows the cynicism that made both Dix and Grosz natural allies of the Dadaists for a while. *War* involves a return to the explicit depiction of reality and a newly intensified engagement with the Old Masters. The next, concluding chapter surveys some of the forms the "death of Expressionism" took.

Max Beckmann,

Women's Bath, 1919

Oil on canvas, 97 x 65 cm.

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.



THE END OF EXPRESSIONISM?

At the end of the war, like everyone else, German Expressionists were faced with coming to terms with the trauma and upheaval of the past few years. But for those who had pinned passionate hopes on the triumph of Expressionism in life and art it was a period of particularly fraught self-doubt and anxious questioning. Broadly speaking, two common reactions – or coping strategies – can be discerned. One was an ever-deeper immersion in what Eckart von Sydow called in 1920 “primitive mysticism”. Transcendental visions of a new, pure, “childlike” utopia rising phoenix-like from filth and destruction continued to spill from the imaginations of Expressionists like Bruno Taut, Wenzel Hablik, Hermann Finsterlin, Johannes Itten at the Bauhaus and other “visionary” architects and artists. In a different manner the longing for a kind of apotheosis, transporting the creative artist from suffering in the earth-bound metropolis to a higher, cosmic realm was given form in a painting, made in 1925, by Felixmüller (p.136). The image is a tribute to Felixmüller’s friend, the poet Walter Rheiner, who had died that year of a morphium overdose. The other significant tendency was towards cynicism, protest and negation. Georg Scholz, who, in 1920 was a member of the KPD and a friend of Dix and Grosz, created a grotesque image of religious bigotry and imperialist ardour in provincial Germany with his *Industriebauern* (Industrial Peasants). What makes the post-war German avant-garde so fascinating, however, is that these two evidently antithetical dynamics often met and mixed within the work of individual artists or groups. This chapter concludes the discussion of Expressionism’s key themes by outlining the various challenges to Expressionism’s survival and validity that had gathered momentum by the end of the war.

Dada emerged in the context of the war and, convinced of the corruption of European culture, threw the integrity of Expressionism into question. By 1920, in a “Collective Dadaist Manifesto” written by Richard Huelsenbeck and signed by a group of Dadaists, Expressionists were angrily accused of apathy, foppishness, of producing “propaganda for the soul”, of a “preference for their armchair over the noise of the street” and the betrayal of the ideals of a whole generation. It is no wonder that Grosz became a Dadaist and that Dix also associated with them. To the question, “has Expressionism fulfilled our expectations?” the answer was “No! No! No!” Instead, the manifesto announced that:

“Expressionism, discovered abroad, and in Germany, true to style, transformed into an opulent idyll and the expectation of a good pension, has nothing in common with the efforts of active men”.

That summer, the Berlin Dadaists staged the *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* (First International Dada Fair). It included signs, montages, modern effigies, Dada publications and constructed exhibits by Grosz, Heartfield, Dix, Schlichter, Hausmann, Baader, and Höch.

Dada is often misunderstood, however, as nothing more than the “No! No! No!” of rebellion and destructive nihilism. In fact, an affirmative, constructive dimension and even a



Conrad Felixmüller,
Death of Poet Walter Rheiner, 1925.
Oil on canvas, 180 x 115 cm
Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
The Robert Gore Rifkind Center for
German Expressionist Studies,
Los Angeles.

George Grosz,
Siegfried Hitler, Cover of the magazine
Die Pleite (Bankruptcy), Nr. 8,
November 1923.
[Original drawing in Busch-Reisinger
Museum, Harvard University Art Museums]
Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY

serious concern with the “spiritual” – *inherited from Expressionism* – was an equally important dynamic. It can be found in the work of Dadaists as varied as Hugo Ball (Zurich), Hans Arp (Zurich and Cologne), Raoul Hausmann (Berlin), Johannes Baader (Berlin) and Kurt Schwitters (Hannover).

Ball was the founder of the Cabaret Voltaire, in Zurich in 1916, in neutral Switzerland, where Dada began. He was a German writer and *dramaturg* who held a deep admiration for Kandinsky, whom he had met in Munich before the war. In one of the decisive performances at the cabaret, encased in a blue, red and gold home-made “cubistic costume”, Ball recited his *Verse ohne Worte* (poems without words). According to his own account, he read with great seriousness, his voice taking on “the ancient cadence of a priestly lamentation”, as he put it.

gadji beri bimba
glandridi lauli lonni cadori
gadjama bim beri glassala
glandridi glassala tuffin i zimbrabim
blassa galassasa tuffin i zimbrabim...

This was a radical critique of conventional language, including of the lyric poetry of Expressionism. Ball was deeply concerned for the fate of “the word”. He saw language as corrupted by journalism and imperialist sloganeering. He found Expressionist phrases also worn and empty and agonised over the incompatibility of art and socialism. His Dadaist *Lautgedichte* (sound poems) therefore involved the destruction of, as he put it, “this accursed language to which filth clings” and an attempt to create new, pure, abstract word-sounds capable of communicating directly with the soul of the listener. In this respect – and indeed owing to Ball’s admiration of the Russian artist – there are close correspondences with the abstraction and the theoretical writings of Kandinsky during the pre-war years. The point is worth making to clarify that the relationship between Expressionism and Dada is more complex than simply that of the redundant old overcome by the radical new.

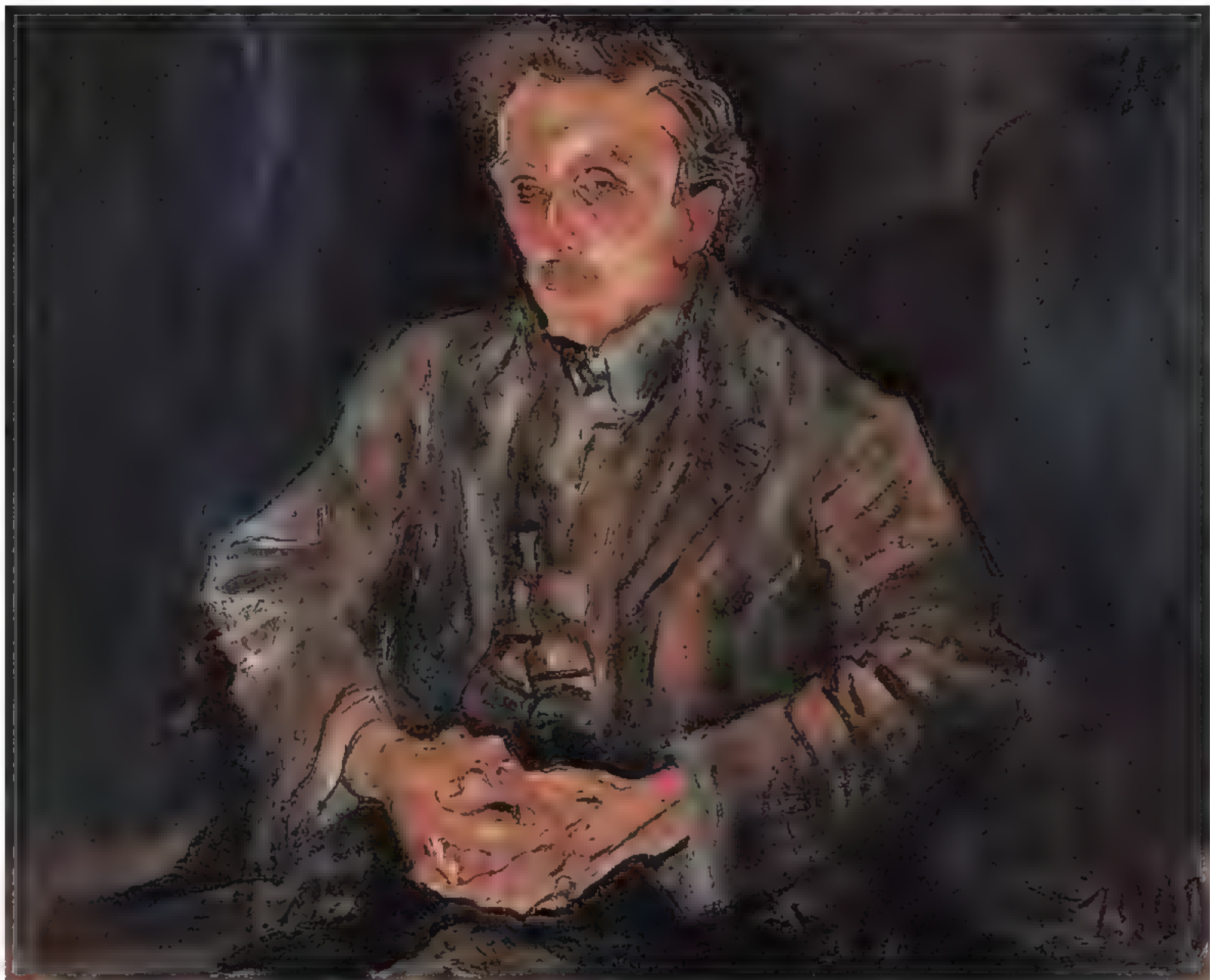
Nonetheless, by 1920 other diagnoses of the “death of Expressionism” were being proclaimed. Wilhelm Hausenstein, once a passionate supporter of Expressionism, reflected melancholically on the popularisation and dilution of Expressionism’s energy. He expressed the nagging doubts, shared by many, as to what its achievements really amounted to:

“Today Expressionism has its crystal palace. It has its salon. No cigarette advertisement, no bar can make it today without Expressionism. It is disgusting ... We live today, we who consciously experienced Expressionism, we who loved it, we who pulled its chariot, with the consuming feeling of having arrived vis-à-vis of nothing”.

In fact, Expressionism and Expressionist ideas were remarkably tenacious and continued to resonate through the 1920s. Certainly a generic Expressionism had become part of dominant, mainstream culture. So-called *Notgeld*, or “emergency money” issued during the hyperinflation of 1920-1923 in the city of Erfurt, for example, was distinctly Expressionist (p.127).

Dada, the Bauhaus, and the so-called “*neue Sachlichkeit*” (new objectivity) of the 1920s, all involved artists, writers and designers reflecting on and – in most cases – rejecting Expressionism’s irrationalism, characteristic inwardness and subjectivity. What appeared to take their place was a kind of “new sobriety”, as it has been called. Thus, the hopeful crystalline

Oskar Kokoschka,
Adolf Loos, 1909
Oil on canvas, 74 x 91 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin







Max Beckmann,
The Iron Bridge, 1922.
Oil on canvas, 120.5 x 84.5 cm.
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,
Dusseldorf.

Alfred Hanf,
Notgeld von Erfurt (Emergency Money),
1921.
94 x 73 cm.
Collection of the author.

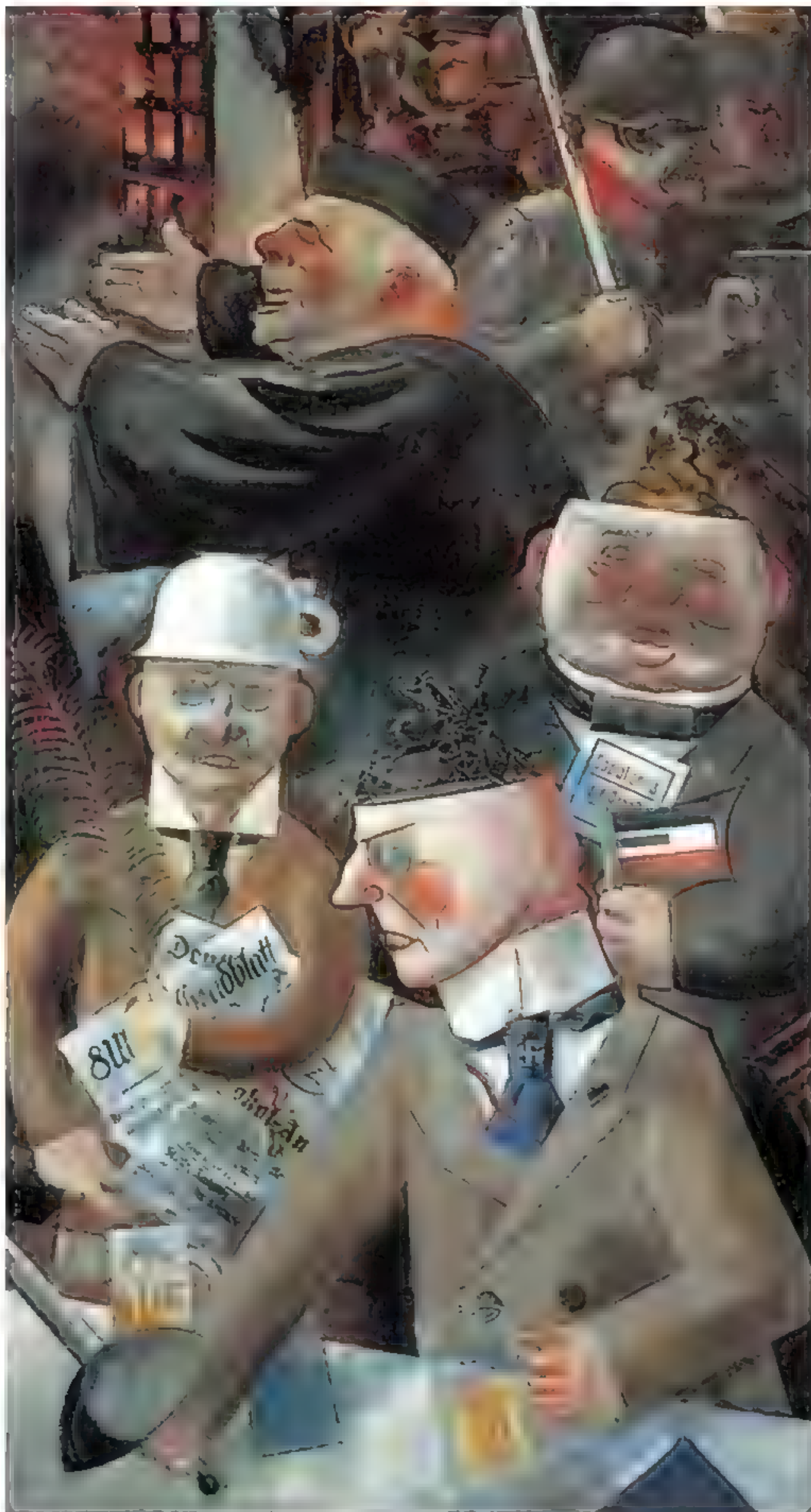
George Grosz,
The Pillars of Society, 1926.
Oil on canvas, 200 x 108 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.
Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY

George Grosz,
Daum Marries her Pedantic Automaton
George in May 1920.
John Heartfield is Very Glad of It, 1920
Watercolour and collage, 42 x 30.2 cm.
Private collection.
Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY

symbol of Feininger's "Cathedral of Socialism", heralding the Bauhaus' foundation in 1919, had given way, by 1923, to a new geometric simplicity and an ethos encapsulated in the phrase "Art and Technics: A New Unity", under which the Bauhaus launched its exhibition for that year. 1923 was also the year that German hyperinflation spiralled completely out of control, compounding both the misery and sense of unreality in which many were living. It reached the obscene rate of 4.2 billion marks to one single US dollar before the currency was scrapped completely and replaced with a new one. In response to the demand for ever more banknotes of escalating face value, the Bauhaus student and later master, Herbert Bayer, produced stripped-down and functional inflationary notes for the city Weimar.

1923 was also the year in which, in November, Adolf Hitler and his thugs attempted and failed to seize power in the so-called Munich Beer Hall Putsch. Grosz immediately cast him, brilliantly, as an absurd "Siegfried" on the cover of the aptly named journal *Die Pleite* (Bankruptcy) (p.123). And it was in 1923 that the curator Gustav Hartlaub first began to think about organising the exhibition that would eventually proclaim the existence of *Neue Sachlichkeit* in 1925. Beckmann and Dix were among the artists to whose work was attributed this new term – a phrase no less contested and problematic than "Expressionism". The detached realism, lack of sentimentality, discreet humour and machine-like precision of Karl Hubbuch's drawings are other examples of the newly-diagnosed *Neue Sachlichkeit*. But this cooling objectivity could encompass as wide a range of stances as Expressionism had accommodated. In the German avant-garde of the 1920s there can be found extremes of cynicism, committed political idealism, and an almost catatonic indifference.

What really finished Expressionism was the brutal and coldly-calculated campaign waged against it by the Nazis. They had tolerated and on some occasions even embraced some of the





more established products of Expressionism in the first years of the regime. However, deciding finally to demonise it as *volkswidrig* (adversary to the people) and the product of a corrupt past, their vitriol peaked in 1937. This brought the purging of museums and the exhibitions of so-called *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) across the German *Reich*. In a campaign orchestrated by Adolf Ziegler, painter of insipid nudes and a favourite of the *Führer*, thousands of works by Nolde, Kirchner, Heckel and nearly all the Expressionists featured in this book were stripped from public collections. Many were displayed for ridicule, held up as examples of the republic's wastage of taxpayers' money and then destroyed or sold abroad. Around 16,000 confiscated works were kept in storage at the Ministry for Propaganda.

On 20 March 1939, around 5,000 paintings, prints and drawings, most of which were by Expressionist artists, were burned having been determined as "*unverwertbarer Bestand*" (property of no value). A poster for one of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibitions shows a "primitive" Expressionist sculpture superimposed against the dark caricatured features of a Jew. Nazi propaganda attempted to present Expressionism as insulting to war veterans, denigrating of German women and above all, as "Jewish" and "Bolshevist". By this time, many Expressionists had left Germany, others were forbidden to work, some were incarcerated in concentration camps and some, like Dix, ensconced in a far corner of Germany by Lake Constance, went into so-called "inner emigration". Ernst Barlach carved a poignant figure of a standing woman in oak in 1936. The following year he gave it its allegorical title, *Das schlimme Jahr 1937* (The Terrible Year 1937), in direct response to the *Entartete Kunst* campaign. By the time of "the terrible year", 400 works by Barlach had been seized from public collections. He died the following year.

From the other end of the political spectrum – the Marxist Left – a serious theoretical debate was conducted between several thinkers including Ernst Bloch (in defence of Expressionism) and Georg Lukács (against) in the Moscow-based journal *Das Wort* (The Word) in 1938. The discussion is now known as the *Expressionismusdebatte* (Expressionism Debate) and it banged different nails into the movement's coffin. Ironically, where the Nazis' crude campaign presented Expressionism as part of a "Bolshevist" conspiracy, many Marxist intellectuals doubted Expressionism's revolutionary credentials and saw in it, instead, bourgeois aestheticism or, even more damningly, the cultural roots of Fascism.

Expressionism's history, from its origins in a term for art that was anti-Impressionist to its youthful pre-war forms in Dresden and Munich, its maturity during the war and finally its demise, involves more than anything else, contradiction. Expressionism thrived on conflict and tension, whether between the old and young generations, between the body and the psyche, between the material and the spirit or between reality and fantasy. It is perhaps because of this dialectical character that Expressionism cannot be grasped as an entity, and will remain a contested field of German culture. Debates in the 1980s about the emergence of a so-called "Neo-Expressionism" testified to this. For some, German Expressionism was reactionary, self-obsessed and atavistic. For others, it was revolutionary, humane and progressive.

Undoubtedly it contained all these elements and more. It is hoped that this book has shed light on this diversity and complexity. However we judge Expressionism, we should guard against reducing its motley and effusive products to just another "ism" in art's history.

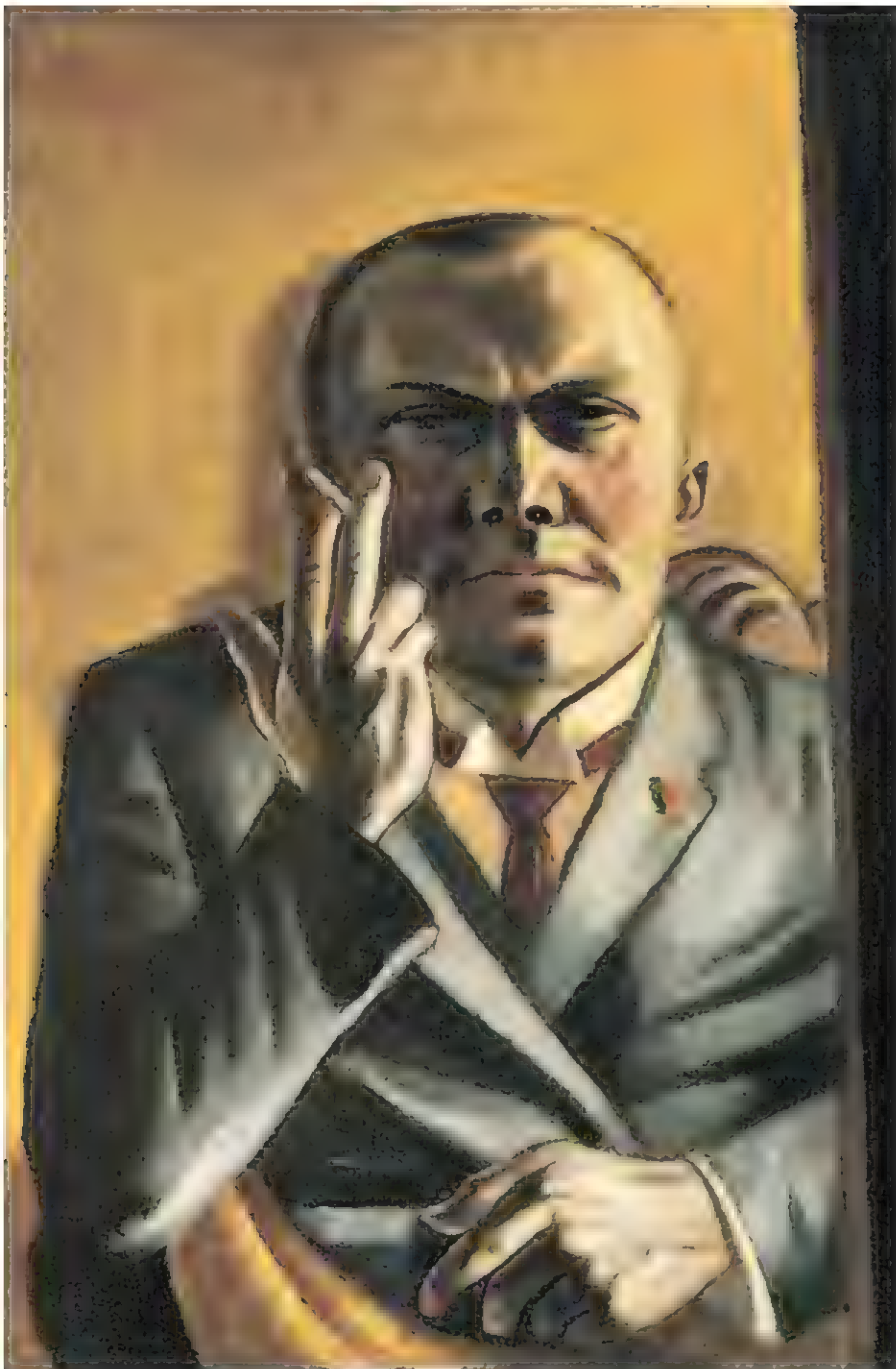
George Grosz,
The White-Slaver, 1918.
Watercolour, fountain pen and Indian
ink on card, 31.7 x 23.8 cm.
Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt,
Darmstadt.
Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY

Otto Dix,
*Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia von
Harden*, 1926
Oil and tempera on wood,
121 x 89 cm.
Musée national d'art moderne,
Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris.





MAJOR ARTISTS



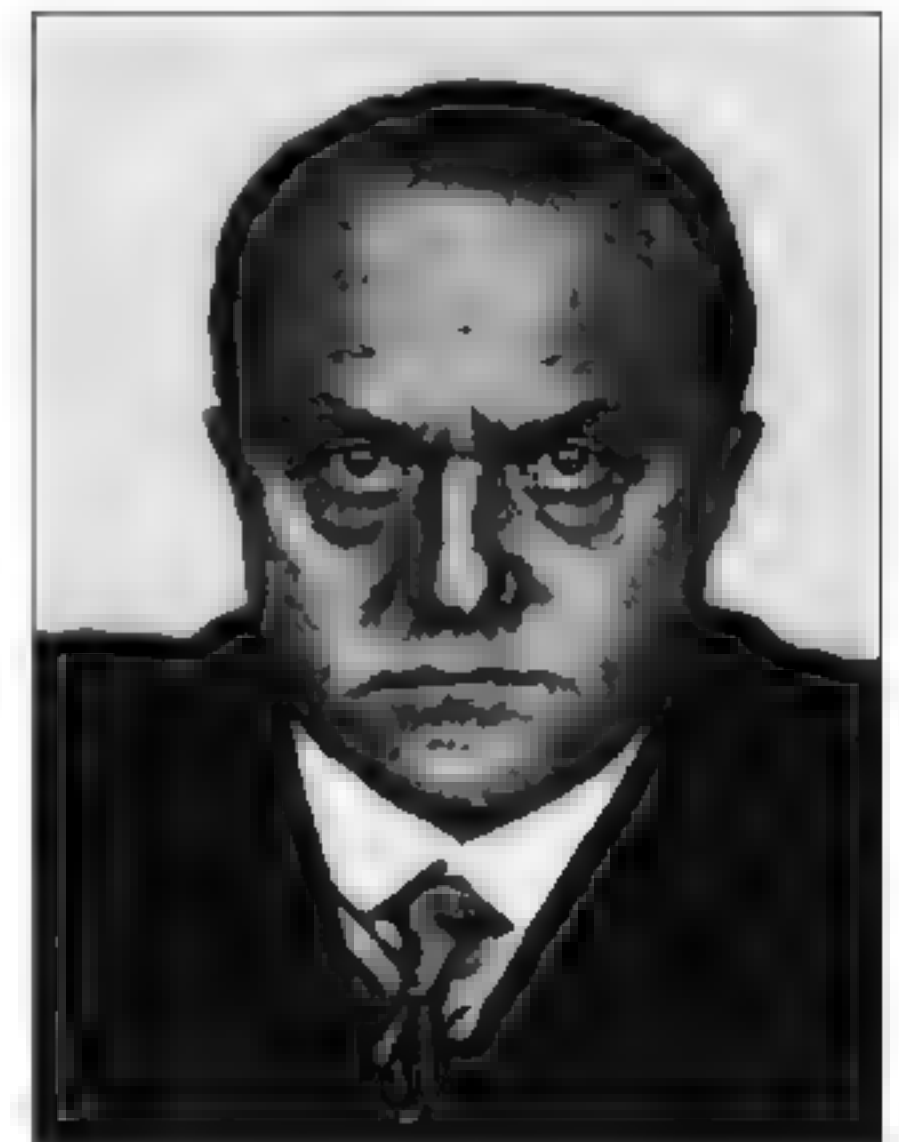
MAX BECKMANN

(1884 Leipzig – 1950 New York)

*M*ax Beckmann was born in Leipzig. As a student in the cradle of Germany's Enlightenment, Weimar, he read avidly the works of Schopenhauer and became interested in Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche. Having graduated in 1903, he painted his early canvases in Paris. Cézanne particularly impressed him. Beckmann's own early work was in a broadly Impressionist mode and could sometimes be quite traditional in its composition and treatment of historical or monumental subjects. Beckmann retained through his life an instinctive feel for the art of the past, gravitating towards images and epochs in which he saw powerful and simple expression. As his own distinctive style developed, this took the form especially of a creative engagement with the art of the Middle Ages and the Northern Renaissance. Beckmann remained aloof from Expressionism's core groupings and the impassioned programmes they issued. In many ways he was never a true "Expressionist". However, his work between the war years and the mid-1920s constitutes a major contribution to avant-garde German art and to the development – and decline – of Expressionism.

Like several other artists featured in this book, such as Schiele, Dix, Kirchner and Kokoschka, Beckmann produced some of his most important work in the form of self-portraiture. The relatively naturalistic *Selbstbildnis als Krankenpfleger* (Self-Portrait as Medical Orderly) is an early example. Beckmann painted it during the war, in 1915 when he worked for the Red Cross at the Belgian Front. His letters home to his first wife, Minna, reveal that he was fascinated by the comings and goings in the hospitals, overwhelmed by the flood of impressions and experiences on which he felt his art could "gorge itself". However, by July of 1915, the intensity of war had become too much. Beckmann suffered a serious nervous breakdown and was discharged.

In 1919, in the aftermath of the war, Beckmann visited Berlin. This was in March, at the height of the street fighting between revolutionaries and *Freikorps*. He responded to the chaos and violence in Germany's cities with two of his most significant works of the period: his painting *Die Nacht* (The Night) (p.112), and the portfolio of large lithographs entitled *Die Holle* (Hell). The "darkness" of his vision and the blackness of his humour as he surveyed contemporary Germany is inescapable in both works. The title page of *Die Holle* has Beckmann – wearing a kind of jester's collar – in a fairground booth. A sign-cum-inscription announces that "Hell" promises us "a great spectacle in ten pictures". Below Beckmann's booth we read: "We ask our esteemed public to step closer. You can look forward to the pleasant prospect of not being bored for 10 minutes. Anyone not satisfied will have their money refunded". Berlin had become a hellish and tawdry circus of the macabre. The first of the print series is *Der Nachhauseweg* (The Way Home.) It shows Beckmann himself,



Max Beckmann,
Self-Portrait with a Cigarette, 1923.
Oil on canvas, 60.2 x 40.3 cm
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Photograph of Max Beckmann by Hugo
Erfurth, 1928



Max Beckmann,
Still Life with Daisies, 1921.
 Oil on canvas, 49.5 x 35.5 cm.
 Private collection.

Max Beckmann,
*View of the Eiffel Tower from
 the Window*, 1930
 Coloured chalk, 64.9 x 50.2 cm.
 Museum Ludwig, Cologne.

accompanied by a large black dog, conversing on the night streets with a disfigured soldier. Here, as on other sheets, he uses the device of allowing elements in the picture (his shoulder, the dog's lolling tongue) to extend beyond the picture's confines. This amplifies the sense that his series of vignettes are real windows onto a contemporary hell. Subsequent sheets reveal the city as a place of fighting, hunger, torture and chaos.

A famous portrait photograph of Beckmann was taken by the eminent photographer of the Weimar period, Hugo Erfurt, in 1928 (p.135). Beckmann's strong, distinctive, bulldoggish features are always recognisable in his self-portraits. However, they are often images in which Beckmann assumes a role, distanced from reality, rather like the figure of the circus barker, the guide through "Hell", or the traditional Fool in the culture of the Middle Ages, who pointed through his folly to the seriousness of man's moral depletion. One such image is his *Selbstbildnis als Clown* (Self-portrait as a Clown) of 1921. Beckmann holds a mask, symbolic both of the clown's or Fool's "role" that he plays as an artist, and the "unmasking" function of his work. The guise of the clown and, in many of his works, the inverted world of Carnival provided Beckmann with the means for presenting the world as a cheap spectacle. Gimmick and jest collide with deadly seriousness in Beckmann's work. Both elements can be discerned in this self-portrait.





Beckmann made few public statements about his work, preferring to confine his expression to painting. Precisely because of the scarcity of testimony from the artist, his rare statement, in the form of a "*schöpferische Konfession*" or "creative credo", written in 1918 and published in 1920 by the writer Kasimir Edschmid, has become a central document. One passage is particularly illuminating of the apparently cold, unemotional surface, which contains and acts as a tight control mechanism on the bursting chaos in Beckmann's work – we need only think of *Die Nacht* (The Night) for an example:

"I believe that I particularly love painting so much because it forces one to be objective. There is nothing I hate more than sentimentality. The stronger and more intensive my determination to grasp the unutterable things of the world grows, the deeper and more powerful the emotion about our existence burns in me, the tighter I keep my mouth shut, the colder my will becomes, to capture this monster of vitality and to confine it, to beat it down and to strangle it with crystal-clear, sharp lines and planes.

"I do not weep, tears are despicable to me and signs of slavery. I always think of the thing".

A painting of 1921, *Der Traum* (The Dream), contains many iconographic and compositional elements that were already or would become established in Beckmann's distinctive work: figures crowded into an ambiguous interior, musical instruments and devices, the jesters' collar, ambivalent physical postures and gestures, fragments of signage, the fish (p.139). The zig-zag composition draws on the steep, subjective pictorial space and angularity of forms found in Gothic art. In a detailed compositional analysis of the painting in 1924, the critic Wilhelm Fraenger compared Beckmann's consummate ability to order organically the fullness of churning movement in his picture with the old Flemish master Pieter Bruegel's powers of organisation over the forms of tumult. Beckmann himself once spoke of the "mixture of somnambulism and terrible lightness of consciousness" in his art. The phrase is an apt description of the "dream" here – at once painfully vivid and obscure. The ascetic chalky colours, with the pallor of skin offset by gaudy attributes, are also distinctive of this period in Beckmann's work, from about 1917-1925. After this, he made increasing use of the strong areas of black and intense colour that so characterise his later work.

In 1925, Gustav Hartlaub, director of the Mannheim Kunsthalle, organised the exhibition that inaugurated the imperfect phrase "*neue Sachlichkeit*" (new objectivity) as a critical term for painting "after Expressionism". The exhibition was dominated by Beckmann's work. It included images of modern alienation and *ennui* in the midst of chaos – *Tanz in Baden Baden* (Dance in Baden Baden) of 1923, painted in the year of Germany's rampant hyperinflation is an example (p.138). With this formal coupling to the *Sachlichkeit* of which he had so often spoken, Beckmann was cast as a torch-bearer for the future of German art in the wake of Expressionism's demise.

Beckmann left Germany with his second wife, Quappi, in 1937, the day after hearing Hitler's hate-filled speech inaugurating the House of German Art in Munich. They went into exile in Amsterdam and stayed there, isolated and in danger, before moving to the United States in 1947 where Beckmann took up a teaching post at St Louis. He died of a heart attack in New York three years later, on his way to see an exhibition of contemporary American painting (including his own work) at the Metropolitan Museum.



Max Beckmann,
Dance in Baden Baden, 1923.
Oil on canvas, 100.5 x 65.5 cm
Pinakothek der Moderne Kunstareal
Munich, Munich.

Max Beckmann,
The Dream, 1921.
Oil on canvas, 182 x 91 cm.
The Saint Louis Art Museum,
Saint Louis.

OTTO DIX

(1891 Untermhaus bei Gera – 1969 Singen)



Photograph of Otto Dix.

Otto Dix,
Self-Portrait as a Smoker, 1912.
Oil on paper on cardboard,
70.5 x 56 cm.
Kunstsammlung Gera, Gera.

Otto Dix was one of the few artists featured in this book who came from a working-class background. Later in his career he became known as the “Cranach of the proletariat”. Dix was born near Gera but gained his first experience and training in art in the venerable Baroque city of Dresden. He would return there in 1927 to take up a position as Professor at the Academy. However, Dix's first important work was produced in the midst of the violence of the First World War. Slightly younger than the first Expressionists, he had a long and prolific career, in which his work went through significant changes. Loosely, these changes followed the key developments in the German avant-garde, from Expressionism to Dada and then, from about 1923, the so-called *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). However, Dix's work was so varied that it cannot easily be reduced to simple formulae. Although he was one of Germany's foremost modern artists, underlying much of his best work, especially from the mid-1920s on, was a close engagement with the Old German Masters – Cranach, Dürer and Baldung Grien.

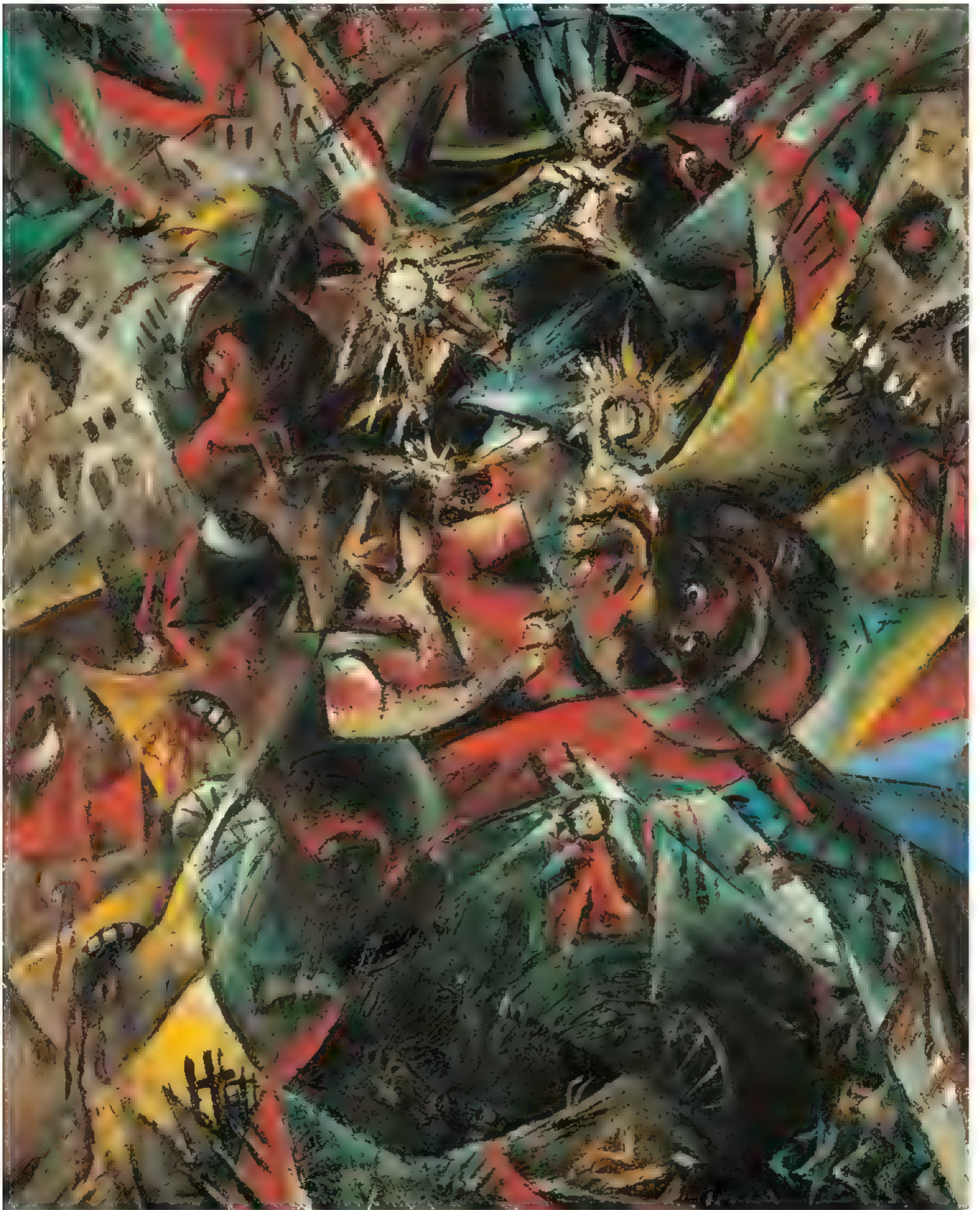
During the First World War, Dix saw long active service and was wounded several times. Nonetheless, when he could, he painted and made gouache sketches and drawings in a vivid, energetic Expressionist manner. He recounted that he enjoyed drawing as an antidote to the drudgery and hours of uneventful boredom that was part of life in war.

A fellow artist, Otto Griebel, whom Dix knew from Dresden, reported that he once encountered Dix by chance in the trenches. Dix showed him a large number of Expressionist drawings and tempera paintings. Evidently his artistic talents even had a practical application in trench warfare. According to Griebel, Dix had painted two oil landscapes, in realistic detail, which were positioned at the machine gun post above the trench to help soldiers orientate themselves.

Faced with the image and identity of himself as a soldier, Dix's response was ambivalent. It has been remarked that the artist was torn between seeing himself as a victim or as an aggressor in war. It is clear which prevailed in his *Self-Portrait as Mars* (p.142).

Nonetheless, there is some ambiguity here too. Dix's head appears both to emanate and to be invaded by spectacular explosions and fragments of burning houses, leaping horses, skulls and bleeding orifices. In this orgy of colour and Futurist dynamism, Dix envisages himself as Mars, god of war. Yet in the same year, with sardonic morbidity and a good dose of black humour, the soldier-artist painted the image of his own head on a whitened background as a shooting target. Self-portraits such as these can be taken in the spirit of a remark made by Dix: “You have to be able to identify with that you depict”. Dix returned to the subject of war over and over again in his work – as discussed in the chapter on war and revolution in this book.





When the war was over, Dix became involved in Expressionist and socialist circles such as the Berlin-based *Novembergruppe* and another group in Dresden, which also included the precociously gifted Felixmüller. Dix described himself many times as a “realist”. In his speech and behaviour he was blunt and had little time for idealistic dreams of revolution. This set him apart from many fellow Expressionists, for as we have seen, the movement was a magnet for dreamers, world-reformers, would-be visionaries and all manner of utopian spirits. Felixmüller once tried to encourage Dix to join the Communist party (KPD). When Dix was told that the subscription fee was five marks he snorted his outrage and, characteristically, declared he’d rather spend his five marks on a visit to the whorehouse.

Prager Straße (Prager Street) was one of Dix’s most innovative and memorable responses to the aftermath of war (p.145). As with his group of crippled war veterans playing cards, of the same year (p.115), Dix used the blunt juxtaposition of artificial materials, fragments of everyday objects and oil paint to reconstruct a chaotic reality of broken bodies and alienated modernity. The two war veterans in the busy street live with bodies that are incomplete. A bourgeois officer bustles briskly along on wheels, juxtaposed with an anti-Semitic flysheet. A poorer ex-soldier, his eyes unseeing, begs but receives only a carelessly tossed postage stamp as alms. The sight of thousands of maimed war veterans on the streets of Germany’s cities was a painful and embarrassing reminder of a lost war. By focussing on the violent effects of war on these bodies and the crudeness of their prosthetic reconstruction, Dix was clearly determined to allow no sentimental gloss on the war experience. The uncomfortable subject, rendered directly, was his means to make a powerful political critique both of the war and of contemporary Germany in its aftermath. Everything, from the hurried passers-by to the expensive prosthetics in the shop window that the beggar cannot afford, and even to the fuzzes of real hair with which Dix has constructed the wigs in the shop window at the upper left, emphasise the grotesque plight of these men and the superficiality of a society in which they now have no place.

In the summer of 1921, Dix visited the city port of Hamburg. Down by the harbour he watched troops of sailors, briefly ashore to enjoy the pleasures of dry land. In the city’s notorious red-light district, on and around the Reeperbahn, he found prostitutes and brothels in abundance. Dix responded in many different ways to this milieu. Perhaps aware of the real seediness of the harbour’s sexual traffic, Dix’s romantic dramatisation, in *Abschied von Hamburg* (Farewell to Hamburg) of the sailor’s life as one of exotic adventure on the high seas is intentionally kitsch.

Dix had become associated with the Dusseldorf Expressionist group *Das junge Rheinland* (Young Rhineland) in 1920. In that city, his work was promoted by Mutter Ey (Mother Egg,) a rotund eccentric with a progressive gallery and an eye for the best avant-garde art.

In 1922 Dix moved there from Dresden. From this time, his dealer was Karl Nierendorf, a man who exerted a considerable influence on Dix’s development. It was at Nierendorf’s encouragement that Dix embarked on one of his most important works, the *Krieg* (War) series of etching portfolios. The images – around fifty in total – show modern war in all its rich horror from blasted landscapes to dying soldiers, rotting corpses and modern gas warfare. When he began these works, Dix already knew how sensitive the German public was about representations of war that showed its filth, blood and guts.

Otto Dix,
Self-Portrait as Mars, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 81 x 66 cm.
Haus der Heimat, Freital.



In 1928, a large and painfully detailed painting of the nightmarish horrors of trench warfare, *Der Graben* (The Trench), was bought by the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne. Dix based its grisly carnage on numerous studies he made in the morgue and at anatomy classes. It was the painting of which the eminent critic Meier-Graefe said it made one want to “puke”. *The Trench*, which is lost today, probably destroyed by the Nazis, caused such an outcry that the museum was forced to return the painting to Nierendorf.

In the 1920s, it was Dix’s reputation as a portraitist that secured him the most success and financial gain. His razor-sharp painting of an ultramodern woman, with a whiff of decay about her, the journalist Sylvia von Harden, is exemplary of his best works in the unflinching style of so-called *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) (p.132).

By the time Dix became a Professor at the Dresden Academy, he was working with methods and materials more commonly associated with the Old Masters of the sixteenth century. His *Großstadt* (Metropolis) triptych of 1928 was prepared with infinite care and intended as a modern masterpiece (p.144). By this time, Dix had eschewed Expressionism. Nonetheless, the tableaux of sex in the city, based on the glitter and the squalor of Berlin, with its pungent juxtaposition of Eros and death, continues the themes that had preoccupied Dix almost from the start.

A common misapprehension about Dix is that because he refused to repeat the formulae of beauty, he was fixated on ugliness. Not long before he died an old man in 1969, Dix said: “I was never really all that interested in showing ugliness. Everything I saw, it is beautiful”.

Otto Dix,
Metropolis, central panel, 1927-1928
Mixed technique on wood, triptych,
181 x 101 cm for each panel.
Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Stuttgart.

Otto Dix,
Prager Street, 1920.
Oil and collage, 100 x 80 cm.
Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Stuttgart.





GEORGE GROSZ

(1893 Berlin – 1959 Berlin)

George Grosz, who spent much of his childhood in a small town in the German province of Pomerania, was fascinated by big cities. Those that gripped his imagination most were the biggest and most frenetic – above all, Berlin and New York. He made Berlin his home until the rise of Nazism made Germany unbearable, but he dreamt of America, his youthful imagination fired by stories of cowboys and gold-diggers. Grosz's early work, made during the First World War, is his most "Expressionist". His drawings and paintings of alienated individuals, rioting masses, furtive criminals, prostitutes and (very real) brutal mass violence are staged in the streets, tenements and back alleys of Berlin. He also absorbed some of the Italian Futurists' dynamic, energy-laden compositional devices so well-suited to conveying the more spectacular effects of modernity – electric lighting, mass transport and the surging movement of urban crowds.

However, Grosz was essentially self-taught. He was a natural satirist. Drawings such as *Riot of the Insane* show how tightly economic his line quickly became. The genuinely horrific violence is rendered blackly comic as sex-attackers, lunatics and axe-wielding murderers clash with passers-by in a mêlée so chaotic that we can no longer tell the sane from the insane, comedy from tragedy. The child-like swirls of smoke, toy-like ships and the sun with little eyes peeping over the horizon add to the absurdity and an irreverent sense of infantile glee in the chaos (not least at the woman who loses control of her bladder as she is dangled by the hair from an upper-storey window.)

In a characteristically provocative gesture, Grosz anglicised his name from Georg to "George" in September 1916, at the height of the war. In a period of reprise from the army service he so hated, in a canvas reeking of gothic melodrama, he painted a gaunt and deathly pale figure. Loosely based on his ill-nourished wartime self, Grosz called it *Liebeskranker* (Lovesick) (p.150). The palette is that of cold moonlight, gangrene, black-and-blue night, and congealed blood. The figure is one of Grosz's alter-ego types – an adventurer dandy. His bearing and silver-handled cane mark him as an aristocratic rogue, the anchor tattoo on his skull and gold earring as a rootless, pirate figure of the high seas. The crossbones before the dog curled up on the ground are the pirate pendent to the figure's white skull. At the centre of the composition is the pistol and blood-red heart beating at his breast. Morbidly, they suggest a crime of passion – committed (murder?), or yet being contemplated (suicide?). The accessories for intoxication litter the table – drink, and drugs. Grosz was a heavy and enthusiastic drinker.



George Grosz,
The Oracle, Self-Portrait, 1927.

Oil on canvas, 98 x 79 cm.

Private collection.

Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY

Photograph of George Grosz.

The exaggeratedly steep, angular perspective and lack of horizon is typical of many Expressionist visualisations of urban space. Equally striking here, is the way that Grosz elides the distinction between outside and inside, exterior and interior space. In this nocturne, Grosz collapses the objects and ambience of a café interior into the architecture of the street, so that a disorientation – the visual equivalent of the subject / object's queasy intoxication by love and liquor – ensues.

We cannot know if the glowing white orb is the moon, a night-club spot or the beam of a search-light. Are we looking in or out of the walls and windows?

Urban “apaches” are reduced to barely sentient, sluggish oafs in a drawing from around that same period, of 1917, sometimes called *After It Was All Over, They Played Cards*. It was later published, in 1922, in Grosz's monumental portfolio series of drawings of modern life, the ironically-titled *Ecce Homo*. In a squalid interior, three men, one of whom appears to be a wealthy bourgeois (signalled by his cigar and watch-chain) drink and play cards. The drawing is so constructed that we do not register the horror until we notice the casually discarded machete, cut-throat razor, woman's boot and then, the dismembered corpse of the gang's victim and seeping pool of blood. Grosz described his studio at that time, clearly the setting for this grisly scene:

“My studio was a piece of my world. It was furnished with packing cases ... A gas lamp hung from the ceiling, decorated with a huge black spider with wire legs hanging on a thread. It moved and its long legs trembled in the slightest breeze. ... The little iron stove had to be stoked every morning or else it got very cold, as the wind blew without mercy through cracks round the large studio window”.

It was here that, as he remembered

“I drew drunks, men vomiting, men cursing the moon with clenched fists, a murderer sitting on a packing case with the murdered woman's body inside. I drew wine drinkers, beer drinkers, gin drinkers, and a worried man washing his blood-stained hands”.

A photograph of Grosz with Eva Peter, his girlfriend, who later became his wife, attests to a playful, if macabre, fascination with the subject of the voyeur and predatory sex-murderer. In a scene as worthy of pantomime as a medieval *vanitas* panel, Eva admires her youthful reflection in the mirror behind which Grosz, the unseen and unheeded figure of Death lurks, wielding the weapon of murder

The Woman Slayer, a lurid canvas of 1918, is a more vividly realised image of the *Lustmord* (sex murder) theme. A frenzied, unshaven man wielding a bloodied knife in the place of his phallus is juxtaposed with a woman on whose face the smile of seduction or ecstasy is frozen, at odds with the gruesome dismemberment of her body, as if it has taken her by surprise. The compositional structure is fragmented into vignettes and glimpses caught through night-time windows, in a manner that calls on a common device in Futurist painting, “simultaneity”, in which not just a single frozen moment, but a sense of duration, moments in the flux of time are evoked. If we accept a multiple time-frame as well as multiple spatial “frames”, the canvas takes on a filmic, or storyboard quality.

George Grosz,
Dusk, 1922
Watercolour from “*Ecce Homo*”.
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin
Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY





For example, the man's profile against a red light below the crescent moon may represent the moment of the "woman-slayer's" attack; the falling buttocks and stockinged legs glimpsed through another window a moment in a rape or seduction and the dark, flimsy shadow (left) of a male figure who appears to look back to the corpse with a guilty glance, the murderer lurking before, or escaping after his crime. Even more than in *Lovesick*, Grosz plays on the ambiguities of private and public, intimate and impersonal spaces that interlock in a nightmarish metaphor for the chaos and anonymity of city life.

As Germany slipped further into chaos at the end of the war, Grosz joined the newly-formed German Communist Party (KPD), and committed his art to political critique and education. He became known through the radical publishers, the Malik Verlag, which published portfolios and cheap editions of his drawings, satirical and Dada periodicals. The drawing *Cheers Noske! The Young Revolution is Dead!* is a powerful example of Grosz's work with the Malik Verlag. It appeared on the cover of a short-lived journal called *Die Plette* (Bankruptcy) in 1919. Gustav Noske was the commander in charge of the brutal *Freikorps*, who suppressed the rising Left in post-war Germany by means of vicious street violence and widespread political murder. As such, he was a focus for the bitter resentment felt by those who saw hopes for the "real" German revolution suppressed by the forces of reaction. In Grosz's drawing, Noske raises a champagne glass in toast to his "victory" surrounded only by the corpses of fellow Germans on the city streets.

In his autobiography, Grosz described the violence and political chaos of Berlin in 1919:

"Out on the streets one group of white-shirted men was marching to the slogan of 'Deutschland, erweache! Juda verrecke!' [Wake up, Germany! Jew drop dead!], while another in equal military formation hailed Moscow. That left smashed heads, broken shins, and some nasty gunshot wounds. The whole city was dark, cold, and full of rumours. The streets became ravines of manslaughter and cocaine traffic, marked by steel rods and bloody, broken chair legs".

Described by a Dadaist colleague, Hans Richter, as a "savagely boxer, fighter and hater", Grosz became a key figure in the Berlin Dada movement. His pugnacious nature, his fearlessly irreverent sense for the absurd and black humour were fuel for Dada's political momentum as well as its anti-art stance. These aspects of Grosz, which infuse much of his work, made him resistant to many of the more literary, romantic and utopian aspects of Expressionism.

However, what Grosz undeniably shares with Expressionist contemporaries is a fascinated sensitivity to the intoxicating life-pulse and dynamism of the city. In 1920 Grosz was arrested and charged with insulting the military in a portfolio of drawings, *Gott mit uns* (God with Us).

Further censorship, convictions and fines followed in 1923 and 1928. In 1933, to escape Nazi persecution, he emigrated with his wife to America. In 1959 he finally returned to Berlin, only to die barely a month later after a high-spirited night out on the town.

George Grosz,
Lovesick, 1918.
Oil on canvas, 100 x 78 cm.
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,
Dusseldorf.
Art © 2008 George Grosz / Licensed by
VAGA, New York, NY

WASSILY KANDINSKY

(1866 Moscow – 1944 Neuilly-sur-Seine)



Photograph of Kandinsky during his studies in Moscow, c. 1888

Wassily Kandinsky,

St Vladimir, 1911.

Gilded glass, 29 x 25.6 cm.

Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
Munich.

Wassily Kandinsky was a Russian whose energetic work as a painter, dramatist, poet, organiser and teacher in Germany made him one of the most influential of all artists and theorists of the Expressionist era. When he moved from Moscow to Munich in 1896 to study painting, he was abandoning a promising career as an academic legal economist in Moscow to devote himself to art. According to his widely read "Reminiscences", published by the *Sturm*-Verlag in 1913, two events had triggered this momentous decision. One was an exhibition of French Impressionist painting including Monet's *Haystacks* and the other was a performance of Wagner's *Lohengrin* at the Court Theatre.

There is a leitmotif in Kandinsky's work. Laden with chivalric and heroic connotations, it is the image of a solitary horseman. It appears probably for the first time in one of his earliest works, from 1901. It already shows this romantic figure, charging through a moonlit landscape, lance poised and cape flying. In 1902 Kandinsky showed this work at the second exhibition of the *Phalanx*, a group that he had founded in Munich. It appeared there alongside contributions from many leading figures of *Jugendstil*, such as the artists and designers of the newly-formed *Künstlerkolonie* (Artists' Colony) at Darmstadt. The sense of mission that the rider symbol evokes developed over the years into a zealous conviction, shared with a small group of other artists, in the potential salvation that art – when it emerged from an authentic "*innere Notwendigkeit*" or "inner necessity" – could bring to an enervated world. The motif resurfaced in 1911 when Kandinsky and Marc collaborated on the *Blauer Reiter* (Blue Rider) project, discussed in more detail elsewhere in this book (p.35).

Although he travelled extensively and over long periods of time, Munich would be Kandinsky's artistic base until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Nonetheless, he felt and expressed in his work a strong bond with old Russia and his beloved home city of Moscow. Russian forms and motifs from saints and icons to dragons and the distinctive onion-like domes of Russian churches occur in many of his works. His early paintings were in a rich, jewelled, *Jugendstil* manner. They evoke a colourful, dreamlike world of Russian myths, landscapes and traditions, such as *Song of the Volga* of 1906.

From 1908, for the next few years, Kandinsky spent the summers in the Bavarian town of Murnau. His companion, the artist Gabriele Münter, bought a house there that became known as "the Russian House". From its garden, Kandinsky could watch the steam train cut through the landscape on the line between Munich and Garmisch. He gave striking form to its silhouette in a canvas that – unusually in his *œuvre* – acknowledges the material reality of the technological age.





However, by 1910, Kandinsky was striving more rigorously towards the fundamental principle of his beliefs: *Synthese*, "synthesis". This was an inextricable component in his progression towards abstraction. Another manifestation of his concern with synthesis was his hopes for a new form of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). In 1912, he published a book of thirty-eight prose poems, called *Klänge* (Sounds), illustrated with a series of woodcuts. He felt that the juxtaposition of poems with visual images came close to achieving a "synthetic" unity. One of the poems reads:

Now vanishing slowly in the green grass.
 Now sticking in the grey mud.
 Now vanishing slowly in the white snow.
 Now sticking in the grey mud.
 Lay long: thick long black reeds.
 Lay long.
 Long reeds.
 Reeds.
 Reeds.

In a similar spirit of yearning for synthesis between sound and colour, and between painting, poetry, music and theatre, he also wrote a composition for theatre called *Der gelbe Klang* (The Yellow Sound), published in the *Blaue Reiter Almanach*.

In his important theoretical text, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (Concerning the Spiritual in Art), of 1911, Kandinsky explored the metaphorical and associative qualities of different colours and of the whole "language" of art in great depth. His writing is a mixture of convoluted speculation, mysticism, technical explanation and philosophical reflection. In its course, he refers (to differing degrees) to figures as diverse as Goethe, Madame Balvatsky and Marx. However, the key idea in Kandinsky's thought at this time was his faith in an "inner urge" that drives man to create form. Kandinsky saw this creative drive as not only merely positive, but as a force capable of "elevating" material to a spiritual level. He perceived the material realm as a blockage or concealment of the spiritual. Thus, the "negative", which the creative urge – metaphorically the heroic knight on horseback – must overcome, is the "blindness" of modern men. In his thought, it was the artist, driven by "inner compulsion", who had the potential so to transform the material that it would release the spiritual locked within it. At the same time, the spiritual element was itself an active force. Here we encounter the cosmic, universalising aspect of Kandinsky's theories. The artist was not the sole subject in this transformation. Instead, Kandinsky explained this kind of creativity as "the spiritual's search for materialisation". These kinds of propositions were explored in lengthy theoretical essays as well as in experimental artistic practice. In this way, Kandinsky and his colleagues, such as Marc and Klee, contributed significantly to one of the fundamental themes of Expressionism – the dialectic of material and spirit.



Wassily Kandinsky,
Amazon, 1918
 Glass-painting, 32 x 25 cm.
 The State Russian Museum,
 St Petersburg

Wassily Kandinsky,
Pink Knight, 1918.
 Glass-painting.
 The State Russian Museum,
 St Petersburg

At around the same time, Kandinsky was making many “reverse paintings” on glass. These drew from Russian folk traditions and from the painted glass panels he had seen in Bavarian churches. Their colours are luminous and they have a clarity that is quite different from Kandinsky’s canvases. A spectacular example shows St Vladimir with cross and church in hands rising up, sun-like above the massed ranks of baptised souls (p.153).

By 1913, Kandinsky had painted several large abstract compositions on canvas. He was also becoming internationally known – in this year he contributed to the famous International Exhibition of Modern Art, also known as The Armory Show, in New York, Chicago and Boston. The largest and one of the most complex abstract canvases from this period is *Komposition VII* (Composition VII.) The painting measures two metres by three. Around ten oil paintings exist which were executed as preparatory studies for this monumental and highly coloured work. Thirty drawings and watercolours were made to work out the composition alone. Many of the forms derive from apocalyptic motifs. In the face of all this meticulous preparation, it is all the more remarkable that, according to Muntz, Kandinsky completed the work in just three days. It also reminds us that although Kandinsky’s working process involved improvisation, many of its products were not spontaneous outpourings or expressions of capricious emotions, but were actually carefully-planned works, as tightly composed as an orchestral symphony.

When the war broke out, Kandinsky and Muntz went to Switzerland. In November, Kandinsky returned to Moscow. In 1917 he married a Russian woman, Nina, whom he had known for just five months. Muntz never forgave him. After the war, revolution in Russia and a period of involvement in the re-structuring of Russia’s art institutions, Kandinsky was drawn back to Germany in 1921, by an invitation to visit the new Bauhaus in Weimar. The following year he accepted Walter Gropius’ invitation to join the teaching staff.

One of the major works Kandinsky painted at the Bauhaus gives an idea of the direction in which his abstraction moved after the war. *Gelb – Rot – Blau* (Yellow – Red – Blue) of 1925 combines sharp, clear, geometric lines and forms with aura-like haloes of colour. What is interesting is that here, nearly a quarter of a century after Kandinsky first created a rider on horseback charging forth on a mission of salvation, this canvas too is to do with the conflict between heavenly goodness (the light forms on the left) and earthly materialism and evil (on the right). The serpentine black shape like a whiplash at the right is a vestige of the dragon fought by St George. The blue circle with which it appears to grapple is, by a process of personal metaphor and abstraction, Kandinsky’s symbol for the saint on horseback.

Kandinsky took on German nationality in 1928. However, in 1933, the Nazis closed the Bauhaus. Kandinsky moved to Neuilly, a suburb of Paris and lived there until his death in 1944. By that time, he had become a French citizen.

Wassily Kandinsky,
Improvisation VII, 1913
Oil on canvas, 200 x 300 cm
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.





E.L. KIRCHNER

(1880 Aschaffenburg - 1938 Frauenkirch)

The self-appointed "leader" of the artists' group *Brücke* (Bridge), founded in Dresden in 1905, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was a key figure in the early development of German Expressionism. His first works show the influence of Impressionism, Post-impressionism and *Jugendstil*, but by about 1909, Kirchner was painting in a distinctive, expressive manner with bold, loose brushwork, vibrant and non-naturalistic colours and heightened gestures. He worked in the studio from sketches made very rapidly from life, often from moving figures, from scenes of life out in the city or from the *Brücke* group's trips to the countryside. A little later he began making roughly-hewn sculptures from single blocks of wood. Around the time of his move to Berlin, in 1912, Kirchner's style in both painting and his prolific graphic works became more angular, characterised by jagged lines, slender, attenuated forms and often, a greater sense of nervousness. These features can be seen to most powerful effect in his Berlin street scenes. With the outbreak of the First World War, Kirchner became physically weak and prone to anxiety. Conscripted, he was deeply traumatised by his brief experience of military training during the First World War. From 1917 until his death by suicide in 1938, he lived a reclusive, though artistically productive life in the tranquillity of the Swiss Alps, near Davos.

A recurring subject in Kirchner's work is the artist himself, juxtaposed with a model. These self-portraits in studios and other interiors are revealing, shedding light not only on developments in the artist's style, but also on his changing self-image over time. Kirchner was convinced of the importance of regular, even daily study from the nude. He had little time for the academic tradition of the nude. Instead, he embraced a more expressive, enlivened treatment of the human body. Of the Old Masters, it was Cranach who most confirmed his own opposition to "academically correct drawing". He never had models in the academic sense. His subjects were almost always people who were part of his life; friends, lovers, students and colleagues. His many representations of men and women together form something approaching a "cycle". They are a group of works that, on reflection, he felt belonged together as series of engagements with a recurring theme – that of the relationship between the sexes.

We have an impression of the young Kirchner from one of his earliest artistic collaborators, a fellow architecture student and *Brücke* member, Fritz Bleyl. The two had met in Dresden in 1902. Bleyl recalled:

"I encountered a well-built, upright youth of the greatest self-assertion and the most passionate temper, who possessed a gloriously untroubled disposition and an infectiously candid laugh, and who was possessed by a sheer mania to draw, to paint, to busy himself,



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Self-Portrait as a Soldier, 1915.

Oil on canvas, 69 x 61 cm.

Allen Memorial Art Museum,
Oberlin College, Oberlin.

Photograph of Kirchner and Dora
Grosse, Dresden, 1910.



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
Street next to Schöneberg Park,
 1912-1913
 Oil on canvas, 120 x 150 cm.
 Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee.

and to come to terms with artistic things and ideas. His 'digs' were those of an avowed bohemian, full of pictures, drawings, books, painting and drawing gear colourfully lying around everywhere – much more the romantic lodgings of a painter than the dwelling of an orderly student of architecture”.

Kirchner's bold and strident painting, *Selbstbildnis mit Modell* (Self-Portrait with Model) of 1910 is almost a visual realisation of Bleyl's description (p.165). Close to the picture plane, the artist's body, swathed in an extravagant kaftan-like coat, dominates the composition. Naked beneath his robe, his bare feet planted firmly apart and with a large, red-tipped paintbrush in hand, he very much embodies the assertive image of the “avowed bohemian” in his own artistic surroundings.

The relationship between the figures here is interesting. On the one hand they are unequal, insofar that this painting so boldly asserts Kirchner's presence as an individual, creative artist. His active stance and physical domination of the picture contrasts with the

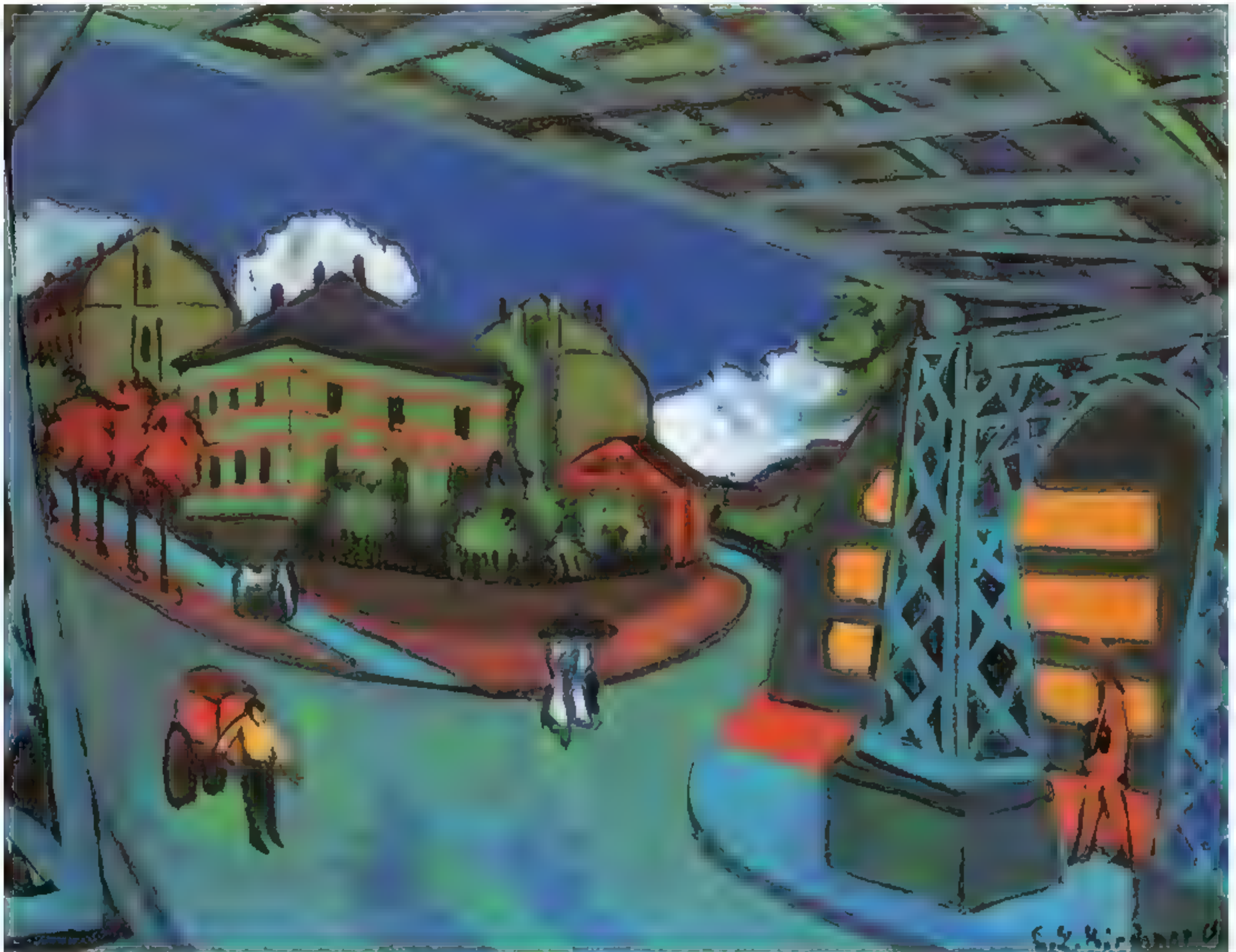


figure of the passive woman who hovers, scantily-clad, in the background. Even the colours used to depict the two figures are dissonant. Only the vibrant pinkness of Kirchner's distinctive, prominent lips, clamping on his pipe, picks up the pink ribbons of her underwear. The woman was Kirchner's lover of the time, Doris Grosse, who appears in numerous sketches and paintings from the years 1909-1911. Here, her presence appears at first to be somewhat reduced to that of a generic "model". She is one of the props of practical studio life. However, the sociability between men and women in the *Brücke* studios, documented in hundreds of drawings and a handful of photographs, complicates the tradition-laden relationship between the male artist and the female model (or "muse"). Here, the model's traditional status as the object and focus of the artist's creative attention is thrown into ambiguity. She sits *behind* him, so that she is seen by the artist only in the mirror in which he looks to observe himself. Both faces are simplified into triangular, mask-like forms. Kirchner's engagement with the relationship between men and women and between art and

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
*Railway Bridge in the Löbtauer Straße in
 Dresden-Friedrichstadt*, 1910-1926.
 Oil on canvas, 70.5 x 90.5 cm
 Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister,
 Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden

Eros was serious and less conventional than is often assumed. He longed for a close, physically uninhibited, open and equal relationship between the sexes. Given the key importance of this theme in his work, it may be possible that, for all its youthful vibrancy, this painting also involves more jaded, ambivalent reflections on difference and alienation in the sexual relationship.

Although Kirchner painted the basis of this work in 1910, he returned to it in the 1920s and re-worked it considerably. We can gain a fascinating insight into some of the process of reduction, amplification and visual “editing” involved in producing such an image by comparing a fairly large drawing, in coloured chalk, on which the painting is clearly based, also of 1910. In the painting, Kirchner has simplified and abstracted the pattern of his robe. He has removed his shirt, tie and shoes. Colours in the painting are intense. The brushwork is broad and thick, giving a strong sense of the physical *act* of applying paint to canvas, underlined by the prominence of Kirchner’s paintbrush in the composition itself. The impression of the immediacy of paint and reality is in fact very carefully crafted. The wet paint on the palette held in Kirchner’s right hand is the orange and blue of his painted robe. The raw canvas can be glimpsed between the areas of pure colours. Most interestingly, the posture of the woman in the drawing suggests that she is observing *him*. She appears more relaxed and more alert than the slightly awkward figure who is both observed and ignored in the painting.

The *Brücke* artists found a rich source of inspiration on many long and short trips out into the German countryside. In Kirchner’s case, one place that seems to have held a special fascination was the Baltic island of Fehmarn. He first went there in 1908 and returned several times in summer in the years leading up to the outbreak of war. *Tower Room: Self-Portrait with Erna* was painted on Fehmarn in 1913. During his stays on the island, Kirchner lived as a guest in the lighthouse keeper’s house. It was a small building adjacent to the distinctive landmark of the lighthouse itself. Kirchner painted himself in his upper room there with his new lover, Erna Schilling. She was to remain his partner and companion until he died. The couple are shown in a narrow, intimate interior. It is a painting of many contrasts. The standing, full-frontal figure of Erna, nude, contrasts with the seated, clothed figure of Kirchner, whose posture conveys just a suggestion of agitation. The couple and the objects between them are all painted in warm, earthy and fleshy tones. Yet the room itself as a cold blue, strikingly unaffected by the light of the candle that burns in the centre. The Baltic Sea and horizon can be seen, green, through the windows. The Fehmarn environment encouraged some of Kirchner’s strongest innovations. In this summer of 1913, he became particularly interested in the liberating relationship between his painting practice and the wood sculptures he was making simultaneously. Erna’s body echoes some of Kirchner’s sculptural forms in its simplified solidity. He saw the “rhythm” of form enclosed in the block of wood as a conduit to what he called “instinctive” picture-making.

One of the most striking aspects of *Tower Room* is Kirchner’s treatment of space. He takes extraordinary liberties with perspective. In many places, conventional perspective is inverted, so that, for example, the table and bench both appear wider, not recessively narrower, at their furthest points. The window frames are similarly wilful. On the table,

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,
The Red Tower in Halle, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 120 x 90.5 cm.
Museum Folkwang, Essen





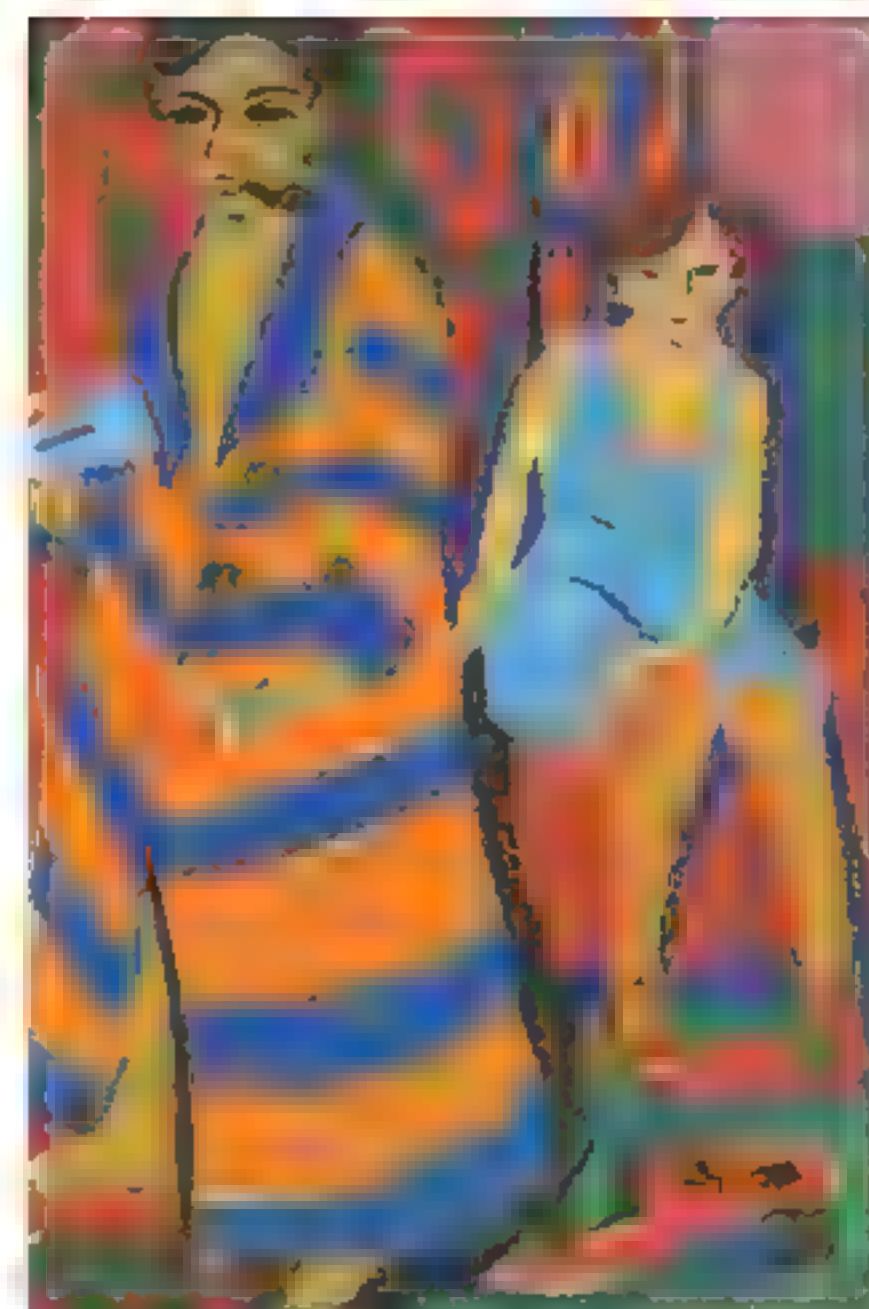
the nearest, squat vase is seen as if from the side, the taller vase, as if from above. There are no pure horizontals, verticals or parallels. The result is a subtly unnerving instability to the painting, lending a psychological *frisson* to the scene of the couple as they interact within this close, private space. The couple can be seen in a 1915 photograph taken in a short-lived little art institute that Kirchner and some colleagues had established in Berlin

A comparison between the exuberant self-portrait of 1910 with his *Self-Portrait as Soldier* of just five years later in 1915 makes for a moving testament to the shattered physical and mental state of the artist in wartime (p.158). Parallels with the earlier painting are clear. Kirchner's self-image, smoking, dominates the foreground, the setting is in the studio, a female model appears on the right in the background. But here, the bohemian robe has been exchanged for the ill-fitting uniform of the 75th artillery regiment. Kirchner dreaded conscription from the outbreak of war and used narcotic drugs and alcohol increasingly to calm his fears. Finally, the unavoidable came and in 1915 he was conscripted into the army as "an involuntary volunteer", as he put it, and sent to Halle for training as a driver. It is not surprising that Kirchner found military life unbearable. He stopped eating and became extremely thin, as his hollow, sallow features and narrow physical frame in this painting suggest. By the end of the year, he had been discharged from the army, suffering a nervous and physical breakdown. In December, Kirchner wrote in a letter:

"I have now been discharged from the army and I want to find a sanatorium where I can recover. I feel half-dead from mental and physical anguish. At the same time they intend to conscript me again. Now I can only work at night".

Self-Portrait as a Soldier presents us with a powerful and harrowing image of the disempowered artist. The bloodied stump of a severed hand at the end of Kirchner's painting arm is both a visual metaphor for his own sense of emasculation and lost creativity and a more direct reference to his real physical incapacity. As if to underline the point, what looks like an abandoned canvas hangs on the wall to the left. At this time he was suffering bouts of pain that rendered his arms and hands useless. Several friends and colleagues were killed on the battlefields. By 1916, Kirchner wrote that he felt constantly under the impression of what he called "a bloody carnival". Two years later, in 1917, Kirchner was struck by a car in Berlin which, on top of the effects of multiple injections in his right arm, culminated in the temporary paralysis of both his legs and arms.

It is a bitter irony that this painting, one of the most psychologically penetrating images of the physical and psychic suffering inflicted by war, a work that deeply affected many who saw it, was co-opted by the Nazis in 1937 in their campaign against modernism. In 1937-38, a total of 639 works by Kirchner were confiscated. The Nazis' notorious exhibition in Munich of so-called "Degenerate Art" featured thirty-two of his paintings and sculptures. The *Self-Portrait as a Soldier* was deliberately given the false and very misleading title *Soldat mit Dirne* (Soldier with Whore). It was thus made propagandistically to suggest the avant-garde's mockery of the German soldier's heroism in war. The distress that his works' persecution in his own country caused Kirchner, as he learnt of it in Switzerland, drove him to destroy several of his own works and ultimately, to take his own life by shooting himself through the heart on 15 June 1938.



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,

Artist Marcella, 1910.

Oil on canvas, 100 x 76 cm.

Brücke Museum, Berlin

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner,

Self-Portrait with Model, 1910-1926

Oil on canvas, 150.5 x 100 cm.

Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg

PAUL KLEE

(1879 nr. Berne - 1940 Muralto)



Photograph of Paul Klee.

Gabriele Münter,
Man Sitting in an Armchair (Paul Klee),
1913
Oil on canvas, 95 x 125.5 cm.
Pinakothek der Moderne Kunstareal
München, Munich.

Paul Klee was not by any means a typical Expressionist. In fact, considering his work, it can be argued that he was not an Expressionist at all. Though they are two very different artists, Klee is like Beckmann in that he resists categorisation. However, he was an important member of the Expressionist milieu and was featured in many of the most significant Expressionist exhibitions and journals of the period. He was an important contributor to the activities of the *Blaue Reiter* in Munich. In the inter-war period, Klee was most readily associated with the Bauhaus. He taught there from 1920-1931 and developed innovative teaching methods and lectures recorded in thousands of pages of notes and drawings. In Dessau Klee shared a Masters' House designed by Walter Gropius in the white, cubic, flat-roofed modern style of the so-called *neues Bauen* (new building) with Kandinsky. Although by temperament not a typical *Bauhausler*, Klee was a significant force at the school associated with *Sachlichkeit* (objectivity) and rationalism. In view of the fact that his work had also interested the Dadaists in Zurich, and that he was later championed by the Surrealists, this testifies to his versatility.

Klee's reputation was as an introverted and meditative artist. It was an image that he partly cultivated himself. Certainly his imagination seems to have held an endless reserve of forms, situations and strange juxtapositions comprising a kind of parallel reality. In fact, his diaries suggest that he could be very passionate, impulsive, gregarious and firmly convinced of his own artistic importance. Like Schiele, he showed great talent at a very young age. Klee's early etchings of 1903-1905, made while still living in his native Berne, which he referred to as his "Opus I", are finely executed, memorable images permeated with *fin de siècle* morbidity and a sharp satirical edge. The "hero" with the wing in one of them, for example, has such a stunted and imperfect wing that he is consigned to the ground, like a turkey. The image suggests the incompatibility of man's urge to apotheosis with the reality of imperfect earthly life.

In 1911, Klee was introduced to August Macke. Soon afterwards, he met Marc and Kandinsky. They embraced him in the group exhibiting under the *Blaue Reiter* name and he contributed to their almanac. In April 1912, Klee travelled to Paris and was deeply impressed by the abstract "Orphism" of Robert Delaunay. Remarkably for an artist so interested in colour, however, Klee worked almost exclusively in graphic media and used little colour in his work until 1914. Then, that spring, he travelled for two weeks to Tunisia with the painters August Macke and Louis Moillet. The trip proved to be a breakthrough for Macke as well as for Klee. Ravished by the North African light and the colours around them, both artists produced some of their best work on the short trip and in its aftermath. Klee's diaries







enthusiastically record a spectacular full moon, "biblical" views into gardens with dromedaries and camels, cacti, snake charmers and scorpion eaters. Klee made many watercolours on the trip and they provided him with inspiration for years to come.

When war broke out, the *Blaue Reiter's* activities came to an end. On 11 March 1916, just six days after the death of Marc that left Klee so devastated, he was himself conscripted into the army. He found himself in transit through wartime Cologne in 1916. In his diary he wrote a description of the city at night and its effects, simultaneously horrifying, apocalyptic and yet festive:

"Cologne is devilish, brightly polished and huge. My impression yesterday evening especially! The parades in the main streets, this military. The crazy station. Right in front the over-life-size museum exhibit, the cathedral. The completely unlit, closely guarded

Paul Klee,

Villa R, 1919

Oil on cardboard, 26.5 x 22 cm

Kunstmuseum, Basel.

Paul Klee,

Red and White Domes, 1914-1915.

Watercolour on Japanese Vellum,

14.6 x 13.7 cm.

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,

Dusseldorf.



Paul Klee,

Tale à la Hoffmann, 1921.

Watercolour, pencil, and transferred printing ink on paper, bordered with metallic foil, 31.1 x 24.1 cm.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Paul Klee,

The Goldfish, 1925

Oil and watercolour on paper mounted on cardboard, 49.6 x 69.2 cm.

Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

Hohenzollern bridge. The river. The sharp lines of four cunning searchlights. Right at the very top above the cathedral's towers the light outline of a Zeppelin, pierced by one of the lines. I have never seen such a city night spectacle, a truly festive theatre of evil".

The description gives a good sense of Klee's sharp senses and imaginative responses to his surroundings. The blackly humorous combination of grotesque festivity and sinister forces can be found in many of Klee's works of the war years, with titles like *Bluck des Damons* (Glance of a Demon) and *Gestirne über bösen Häusern* (Stars above Evil Houses). It is there too in paintings like *Blumenmythos* (Flower Myth) of 1918. Klee was stationed at an airforce base during the war. From the safety of his desk job he watched aeroplanes taking off and landing and he sometimes saw them crash. The bird dive-bombing through the red atmosphere to the ground seems to evoke something of the terror latent in flight.

Klee loved the theatre and music. Many of his works show actor-like figures on an imaginary "stage". Between 1916 and 1925 he made a series of hand puppets for his son Felix. One of them, also in a cheerfully macabre vein, is the figure of *Herr Tod* (Mr. Death).

Klee's art is distinguished by an extraordinary diversity and technical innovation. One of his most effective techniques was actually very simple – oil transfer. This involved the artist drawing with a sharp point on the reverse of a sheet coated in oil paint and laid over another sheet. Chance markings and smudges of pigment appeared as a side-effect of the process.

In this way, Klee achieved for many works the effect of a "ghostly" impression. The technique can be seen in a small work, *Angelus Novus*, which has unusual historical significance today because it was owned by one of the most perceptive and important thinkers of Weimar Germany, Walter Benjamin. Benjamin took his own life in 1940 at the Spanish border, where he believed he was about to be captured by the Gestapo. Not long before his death, he wrote a moving interpretation of Klee's image, which had tragic significance in the light of Europe's cataclysm.

"There is a picture by Klee, called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel, who looks as if he were trying to get away from something, at which he is staring intently. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open and his wings are spread. This is what the angel of history must look like. He has turned his face to the past.

"Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees just one great catastrophe, which piles up unrelentingly wreckage upon wreckage and hurls them at his feet".

One of Klee's most popular paintings today is *Der Goldfisch* (The Goldfish) of 1925 (p.171). A luminescent fish glows brightly in suspension in an aquatic netherworld. Klee was immensely productive during his years at the Bauhaus, but finally, the seizure of power by the National Socialists drove him and his wife to leave Germany for his native Switzerland. *Der Goldfisch* was removed from the Berlin National Gallery and became one of the works exhibited in the notorious *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in Munich in 1937. Klee's late works, in which simplified, archaic forms dominate, show a preoccupation with mortality. Klee died in 1940, after a long period of illness.





OSKAR KOKOSCHKA

(1886 Pöchlarn an der Donau – 1980 Montreux)

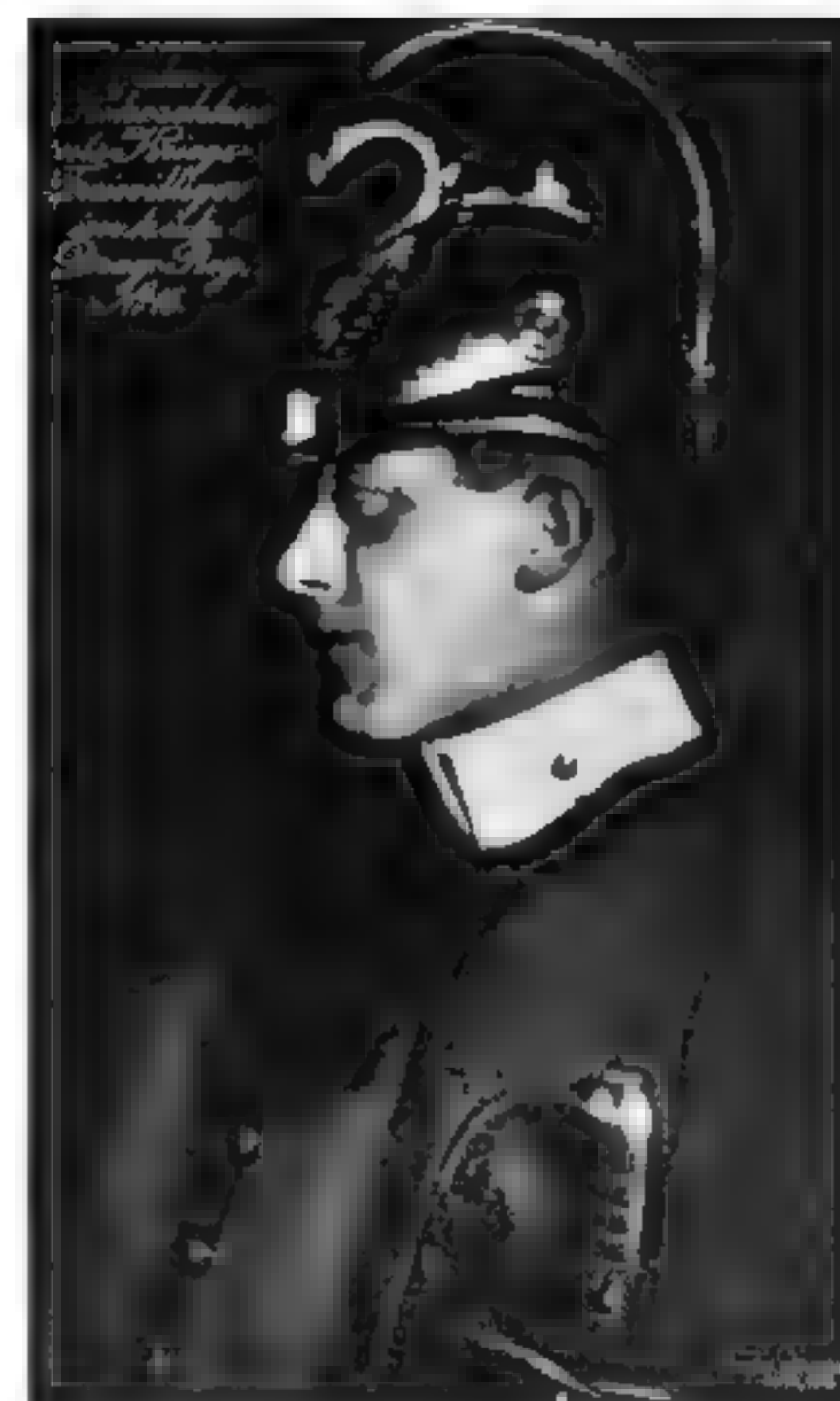
Oskar Kokoschka painted some of the major works of Expressionism and set a new standard for modern portraiture. Towards the end of his long life, his work was described as “eternal Expressionism”. Yet there has long been a strong tendency among critics and curators to regard his earliest work, particularly from the “Vienna years” of 1909–1914, as his best. Certainly Kokoschka created some of his most stunningly original visual and literary work during this period. However, he continued to explore the means for powerful expression in painting throughout his life. Kokoschka was also a significant writer and active in cultural politics – as an outspoken opponent of the Nazi oppression – in his later career.

Kokoschka was born in Lower Austria and emerged from a milieu still under the thrall of Klimt and Viennese Secessionism. He made his name, while still a student, at the 1908 Kunstschau in Vienna with works he produced under the aegis of the stylish Wiener Werkstätte. The already radical and unsettling qualities of his work were recognised early. He was dubbed *Oberwildling* or “Chief Savage”.

Kokoschka did not train as a painter. He studied other techniques at the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts). Yet he had barely graduated when he began his intensive engagement with the portrait genre. The key figure in his early life was the controversial architect and acidic commentator on bourgeois hypocrisy and modern life at large, Adolf Loos.

At the second Kunstschau, in 1909, Loos bought one of the most unusual exhibits – a painted clay bust. This was Kokoschka's *Self-Portrait as a Warrior*. Its mangled, broiling surface, bearing the deep marks of the artist's fingers and the scratches of his tools, is coloured in the pigments of bruised flesh. It can be seen as one of the earliest manifestations of Kokoschka's work as an Expressionist. It is an image both of anguish and aggression. It is also interesting to compare this martial self-portrait with another, a few years later – the *Self-Portrait as a Soldier* of 1914 by Dix. In the Viennese context, Kokoschka's bust can be read as a flagrant renunciation of the smooth, sinuous sophistication of *Jugendstil* and Secessionist decoration. No wonder it appealed to Loos, who publicly decried the Secession's obsession with ornament. He quickly persuaded Kokoschka to break with the Wiener Werkstätte and in so doing, he steered the young artist away from the decorative arts and *Jugendstil* and towards Expressionism. Kokoschka reminisced on the *Warrior's* effect at the Kunstschau.

“I ... exhibited a painted clay bust, on a pedestal, which I called ‘The Warrior.’ In fact it was a self-portrait with a gaping mouth, the expression of a violent cry. As far as the Viennese public were concerned, my room was a ‘chamber of horrors,’ and my work a



Oskar Kokoschka,
Self-Portrait as a Degenerate Artist,
1937
Oil on canvas, 110 x 85 cm
National Galleries of Scotland, Glasgow

Photograph of Oskar Kokoschka,
Volunteer, 1915
Vienna.

laughing stock. Every day I found bits of chocolate and other debris in the open mouth of my bust.

This was probably girls wanting to add their own gesture of mockery at the 'chief savage' ... My much-debated sculpture was bought by Adolf Loos, whom I now met for the first time, and who kept it until his death".

Loos recognised the young artist's raw, precocious talent and encouraged him, particularly in his portraiture. It is therefore fitting that one of Kokoschka's first great portraits was of his mentor, painted in 1909 (p.125).

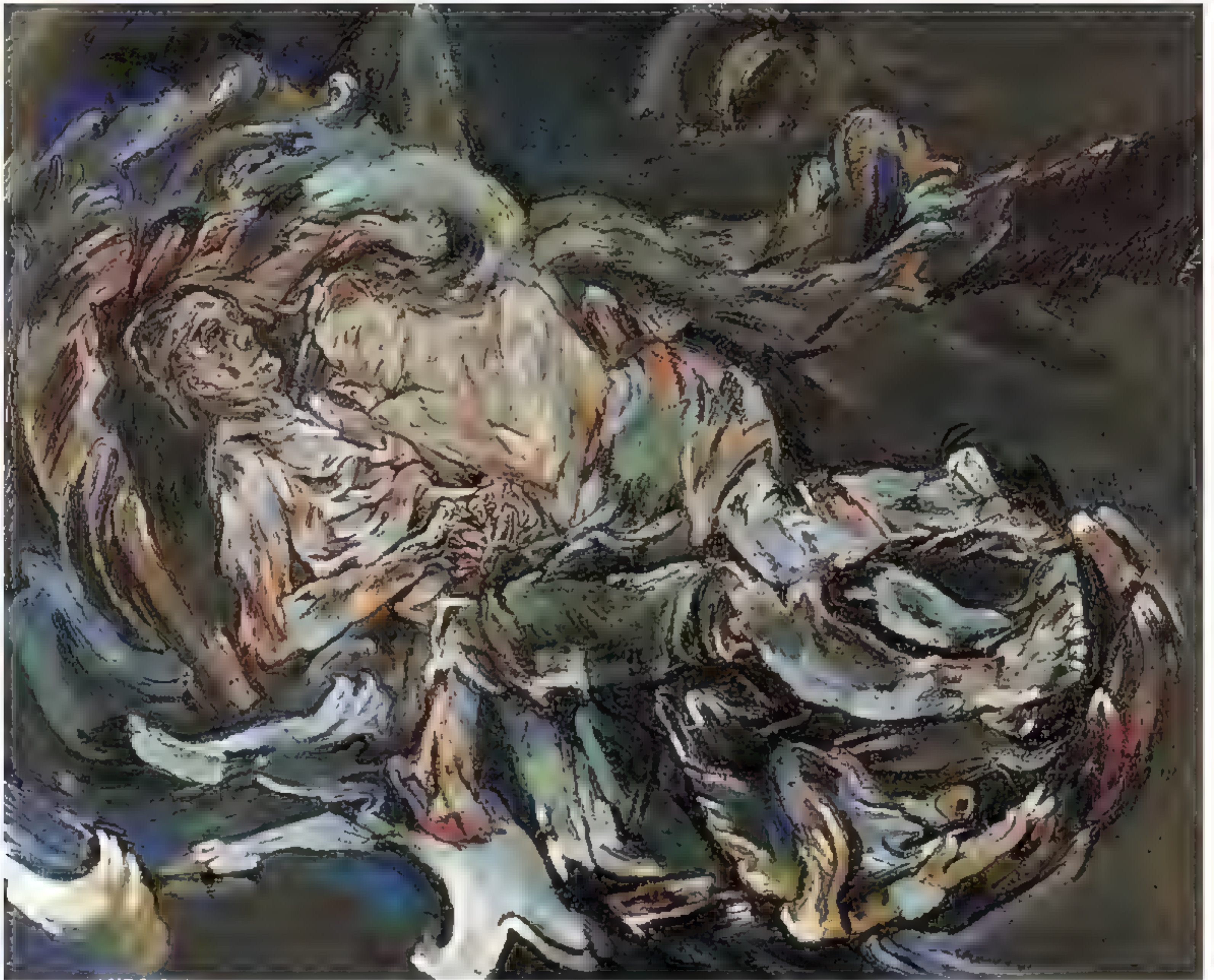
The underlying connotations of decay, decomposition and mortality that Kokoschka brought so disturbingly and effectively to his portraits of living people can also be found in a major still life from the period. Kokoschka painted it in the house of a collector, Oskar Reichel, who had invited the artist to a feast of lamb on Easter Sunday

"The master of the house left me alone in the kitchen for a while. The corpse lay on the table and because it was Good Friday, my thoughts turned to the son of man, whose fate was not very different ... I had the impression that the lamb's eyes were clouding over and becoming lifeless as I watched. But the thought that this dead thing was now to be roasted and consumed! When the master of the house lifted it by its stiff legs to give me a proper view of it, blood dripped from the animal's mouth. I had had enough".

The dead and living beings on the table – a mouse, tortoise, hyacinth, lamb and a white axolotl in a tank are redolent of sweet and sickly smells; dead meat, the perfume of the hyacinth and stagnant water.

The painting for which Kokoschka is perhaps best known emerged from a passionate love affair he had, which has also become legendary *Die Windsbraut* (The Tempest) is a large painting, worked over many times. Its evocative title, which literally means "Bride of the Winds", came from the poet Georg Trakl – Kokoschka had originally envisaged the couple as the Wagnerian lovers Tristan and Isolde. He worked over it many times. At an early stage the painting was dominated by the red tones suggestive of burning passion. In its final state, however, it is a testimony to the artist's own experience of love and longing, crystallised in cold, dreamlike hues of greens, blues, greys and pale pinks (p.175). No victim of false modesty, Kokoschka himself described it as "my strongest and greatest work, the masterpiece of all Expressionist endeavours". The figures, elevated above earthly reality and tossed on the storms of love even as they embrace, are Kokoschka and the woman who possessed his work and his thoughts for many years, his lover Alma Mahler. She was the notoriously seductive widow of the composer Gustav Mahler. When he met her, Kokoschka's infatuation was instant. Alma was older than Kokoschka, but evidently attracted by his talent and good looks. Their affair ended unhappily, indeed traumatically for Kokoschka. While he was away fighting with the cavalry at the Front, his rapacious lover lost interest in him and rekindled her passion for the architect Walter Gropius, whom she soon married. It is a matter of speculation whether the cool tones and death-like embrace of the lovers in the *Windsbraut* contain a presentiment of the death of the affair. Of all the many works Kokoschka devoted to the image of Alma Mahler (which also included a remarkable series of painted fans) this is the most memorable.

Oskar Kokoschka,
The Tempest, 1913.
Oil on canvas, 181 x 221 cm
Kunstmuseum, Basel





Invalided out of the war, Kokoschka spent most of the next few years in Dresden.

But even after the war and the affair were over, Kokoschka could not rid Alma from his mind. Desperate to repossess the object of his desire, the artist commissioned a doll-maker in Munich, Hermine Moos, to create a life-like effigy of his lost love. For six months he bombarded Moos with his requirements, urging her to include teeth, a tongue and a life-like bone-structure beneath skin that he hoped would be pliant and silken. Photographs of the result still exist. Looking at them, it is not hard to imagine Kokoschka's disappointment when he finally took delivery of his ersatz muse. With an even more brutal realism than that with which Kokoschka had depicted so many of his sitters, a painting from this period shows the artist posing grinsly with the "doll", gesturing between her legs. Stylistically, the feathery strokes of the *Windsbraut* period have given way to thick, broad modelling of the bulky forms of his own and the doll's bodies. The leitmotif in Kokoschka's early oeuvre, from his drama *Murderer, Hope of Women* (see p.60) to paintings such as this, might be said to be the irreconcilable conflict between the sexes, or, between desire and reality.

Kokoschka recovered from his obsession and travelled widely in the 1920s. In 1930 he returned to his native Vienna, but, disturbed by its increasingly oppressive political climate, he left for Prague in 1934 and took on Czech citizenship. In Prague, Kokoschka painted another self-portrait (p.172).

At first, it appears to be a straightforward self-portrait. Indeed, it was begun as one. However, Kokoschka gave it a title that complicates and politicises the image: *Bildnis eines entarteten Kunstlers* (Portrait of a Degenerate Artist). He had already begun work on this painting when he learned that several of his works were to be exhibited in the Nazis' anti-

Oskar Kokoschka,

The Emigrants, 1916-1917.

Oil on canvas, 95 x 146 cm

Pinakothek der Moderne Kunstareal

Munich, Munich.



modern propaganda show, *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art), that year, 1937, in Munich. Prominent among the defamed works was his *Hindsbraut*. His drawings were mocked in the exhibition catalogue as no better than the work of a lunatic. In total, around 417 works by Kokoschka were seized from collections and declared “degenerate” and examples of “cultural bolshevism”. It is in this light, and as a mockery of the absurdity of the Nazis’ attempt so to categorise the culture of an era, that Kokoschka painted his “portrait of a degenerate artist”. It may be tempting at first to see this painting as an image of victimhood. However, The fifty-one year old artist’s physical stance and his raised head convey his defiance. Indeed, Kokoschka altered the pose, when the painting took on its political significance for him, so that his arms were folded, all the more to express resistance. In a letter he wrote in November 1938, Kokoschka described: “A new self-portrait ... suggestive and very good .. it could be called ‘Self-Portrait of a Pilloried Artist’ But it looks as if I am having the last laugh at the expense of these idiots”.

In 1938, Hitler’s way into Czechoslovakia was cleared following the Munich Agreement. Kokoschka fled with his future wife, Olda Palkovska, to London. He married her there in an air-raid shelter in 1941. He had long been courageously outspoken in his anti-Nazi views. He had published a letter in a German newspaper criticising Hitler for firing Max Liebermann as President of the Prussian Academy because he was a Jew. From exile in Prague he wrote many articles in protest against the inhumanity of the regime and warning of the atrocities of which it was capable. In London he became active in exile organisations and from 1943, he was president of the Free German Cultural League. Kokoschka became a British citizen in 1947.

Oskar Kokoschka,
Still Life with Cat, Putto and Rabbit,
 1913-1914
 Oil on canvas, 90 x 120 cm.
 Kunsthau Zurich, Zurich.



FRANZ MARC

(1880 Munich - 1916 Verdun)

Already during his lifetime Franz Marc was widely regarded as one of the most promising German painters of his generation. His death in the First World War was mourned as a bitter loss for the art world. It was also a deep personal loss for his surviving friends, Klee and Kandinsky – his other close friend from the *Blaue Reiter* circle, Macke, had died before him on the battlefield. As a young student, Marc had intended to study philosophy and theology. Then, in 1900, he decided to become a painter instead, and registered at the Munich art academy.

Marc's early work was relatively naturalistic, but it showed evidence of his admiration for Van Gogh and Gauguin, whose works he had seen at first hand in Paris. He painted and made some prints and small sculptures. Most of his subjects came from nature. They were landscapes, a few nudes and, increasingly, the animals that would become so central and distinctive in his work. By around 1908 he was starting to intensify his exploration of the movement, behaviour and character of animals. He would spend hours observing and sketching cows and horses in the Bavarian pastures and watching deer in the wild. There are photographs of Marc himself, half-hidden among thick reeds. *Rehe im Schilf* (Deer in the Reeds) of 1909 is a characteristic work of this period. The influence of Van Gogh can be detected in the broken hatched brushstrokes of the grass. However, the sensitivity with which the deers' frisky movements are captured is already distinctively Marc's own.

As he matured as an artist, in keeping with Expressionism's tendency to deal in universals – fundamental ethical issues and philosophies – Marc's intellectual concerns were with a future age of "the spiritual" and with the redemptive function of art in the modern society that he and his friends found so shallow and materialistic. Seeking a deeper experience of the ineffable, Marc formulated it once to his friend Kandinsky: "I want to try to think the thoughts that dance behind a black curtain".

1910 was a key year for Marc. This was when he first met the painter August Macke. Macke became a close friend, drawing Marc out of his artistic isolation. He was also an important conversation partner with whom Marc found he could discuss the technicalities of painting and his most urgent and complex thoughts. One of Marc's most frequently quoted statements on his art was formulated in a letter to Macke in the first year of their friendship:

"Blue is the male principle, severe and spiritual. Yellow is the female principle, gentle, cheerful and sensual. Red is the material, brutal, heavy and always the colour that must be fought and overcome by the others!"

This was also the year when he had his first solo exhibition in Munich, at the Galerie Brakl, and gained the financial support of Bernhard Koehler (Macke's wife's uncle).



Franz Marc,

The Blue Horse I, 1911

Oil on canvas, 112 x 84.5 cm

Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus,
Munich

Photograph of Franz Marc.



Franz Marc,

Red Deers II, 1912

Oil on canvas, 70 x 100 cm

Pinakothek der Moderne, Kunstareal
München, Munich.

Marc gave up his Munich studio and moved with his future wife to Sindelsdorf in Upper Bavaria. A photograph shows Marc there, in relaxed pose.

That winter, surrounded by snow, Marc found the frozen landscape beautiful but "too strongly pure white and blue". It was perhaps in a desire to rise to the challenge of so much white that he painted his beloved dog, Russi, in the January snow. Marc wrote a letter about this painting to Macke, which gives a fascinating insight into the technical challenges it posed. He scribbled a small sketch of the work for his friend and wrote:

"I painted my Russi lying on a field of snow; I made the snow pure white with pure blue depths; the dog a dirty yellow. ... Then I gradually made the dog more 'purely coloured' (light yellow); each time the colour became purer, the dog's coloured borders faded more and more, until, finally, a pure colour relationship between the yellow, the cold white of the snow



and the blue was produced. Furthermore, the mass of blue must not exert itself too strongly against the pure, but weak, light of the yellow of the dog, in order to remain complementary (i.e. justifiable, 'organised')".

Marc's other crucial artistic friendship was with Kandinsky, whom he met on the first day of the new year of 1911. Marc joined Kandinsky's group, the Neue Kunstlervereinigung München or NKVM, but the two had left it together by the end of the year. They found that they shared a missionary belief in, not only the possibility, but also the necessity for art to contribute to the spiritual salvation of modern Western culture. Both were influenced in this by their reading of Wilhelm Worringer's influential thesis, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (Abstraction and Empathy). Together they worked on the *Blaue Reiter Almanach*, published in 1912. In it, they created a fusion of well-known and obscure sources – visual and textual – that resonates with the desire

Franz Marc,

Blue-Black Fox, 1911.

Oil on canvas, 50 x 63 cm.

Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal



to revitalise art by looking back to the past, beyond the Western world and into the ignored realms of art, such as folk art and the art of children.

If we compare Marc's 1909 painting of a pair of deer with another important work that he produced in 1912 – also of two deer – we can see clearly several developments. In *Rote Rehe II* (Red Deer II) of 1912, the painter's concern is no longer primarily with the naturalistic rendition of the deer and their movements (p.180). Marc's vision has become much more subjective. The natural subject itself is now more distilled. Incidental details are eliminated in favour of a synthesis of essential elements. In contrast to the naturalistic earth tones of the earlier painting, this work is now a finely tuned composition in colour. A common misconception about Expressionism is that it simply involved artists spewing forth onto the canvas or page emotional gestures or instinctive impulses. These kinds of outpourings can be found within Expressionism of course. However, works like Marc's *Rote Rehe II* was a product of several years of intensive experimentation, theorisation and reflection on the symbolic properties of colours and their effects in juxtaposition. The colours are orchestrated into an interlocking composition of the simplified forms of the animals, landscape and rolling clouds. Furthermore, Marc's sinuous design unites the composition as well as lending the animals themselves a profound grace. Their arching necks, searching eyes and flattened ears also suggest a sentience highly attuned to the forces of nature around them.

Marc's and Kandinsky's endeavours with the *Blaue Reiter* were part of the Expressionist search for "origins" and for authenticity. In some ways, these were qualities that Marc recognised in the animal kingdom, away from the stultifying effects of civilisation. His woodcut, *Geburt der Pferde* (Birth of Horses) of 1913 envisages a cosmos in which animals represent the forces of creation. In the summer of 1913, Marc embarked on a major series of large and increasingly experimental works. The most important of these was his *Tierschicksale* (Fate of the Animals), as discussed on p.99. Finally, in 1914, just as the war was brewing in Europe, he began to paint almost entirely abstract canvases. An example is *Kampfende Formen* (Fighting Forms). As in Kandinsky's abstract compositions, there are vestiges of landscape elements in the compositions. However, the conflict described by the title is a cosmic one of opposite energies, bright and dark, symbolically, good and evil, tumbling and fragmenting in combat with one another.

In 1916, Marc was one of the 700,000 men killed in the long battle of Verdun. He was on an exploratory mission when he was fatally wounded, by flying shrapnel. In 1937, when the Nazis waged their bitter campaign against modern art in general and Expressionism in particular, they seized 130 works by Marc from public collections and included some of them in the *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibitions. His inclusion was controversial, for Marc was a painter widely held in high esteem and an officer who had died fighting for Germany. Marc's *Red Deer II* was confiscated but later declared a "borderline case" and handed back to the Staatsgalerie in Munich in 1940. Another of his most important paintings, *Der Turm der blauen Pferde* (Tower of Blue Horses) was removed from the exhibition in response to protests from a German officers' association. It landed for a time in the hands of Hermann Göring (who hoarded a collection of the "best" of the art that the Nazis defamed) and was last seen in the possession of the regime in 1945.

Franz Marc,
Yellow Cow, 1911.
Oil on canvas, 140.6 x 189.2 cm
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York.

EMIL NOLDE

(1867 Nolde–1956 Seebüll)



Photograph of Emil Nolde.

Emil Nolde,

Young Men from Papua, 1913–1914

Oil on canvas, 70 x 103.5 cm.

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin

Emil Nolde was born Emil Hansen. In 1902, acknowledging his roots in the region of the Danish–German border, he took the name of his birthplace, Nolde. In becoming an artist, Nolde broke with long tradition – he came from a family of farmers who had worked the same land for nine generations. His attachment to the land of the northern German countryside, and especially to the sea, was given philosophical meaning and a kind of portentousness through the filter of the *volkisch* ideas he gleaned from writers such as Julius Langbehn. Nolde often spoke of the struggle for what he called “*das Heimische*” (roughly translated, the “native regional”) in art. However, he also knew and loved his northern region from first-hand experience. His paintings of the sea- and landscapes of Schleswig Holstein therefore emerged from close familiarity as well as the vividness of Nolde’s imagination.

As an artist, Nolde saw himself as an outsider. Yet his highly coloured, original and richly imaginative work appealed to the much younger *Brücke* artists when they saw it. They responded with enthusiasm and revered, in particular, Nolde’s “storms of colour”. They asked him to become a member of the *Brücke*. Nolde exhibited with them in 1906 and 1907.

Schmidt-Rottluff came to the Baltic island of Alsen, where Nolde and his wife Ada had made a home, to paint for a few months. But such collaborative projects and group activities did not come naturally to Nolde. From his own copious writings, the image of the artist that emerges – indeed, that these texts construct – is that of a lone visionary. An early work, *Freigeist* (Free Spirit) in luminous colours, shows four figures in an indefinite location, suggestive of universal symbolic meaning. In his memoirs Nolde claimed that the painting’s significance only became clearer to him later on. He gave an explanation that is revealing:

“Suddenly and unexpectedly I was driven to something completely different. I painted the ‘Free Spirit’. The air in the background was still fluffy, but the figures were painted in very simple planes, the ground in parallel lines. The free spirit stands in the middle of the picture. Praise to the left, complaints and reproach to the right – none of that touches him. The central figure is surely meant to be myself”.

In this self-dramatisation as the alienated, misunderstood yet stoic and heroically independent artist, Nolde perpetuated a common convention. It was a potent image in Expressionism, but not a new one – it can be traced back through the Symbolist movement of the *fin de siècle* to the Romanticism of the early nineteenth century.

Some of Nolde’s most spectacular paintings are seascapes. The sea, especially at times and seasons on the cusp of change – sunset, sunrise, autumn – was an enduring, yet endlessly changing subject. Nolde painted it, without the need for anecdotal detail, in a vast range of moods and weather effects. It has been argued that only Turner before him had ever





Emil Nolde,
Christ and the Children, 1910.
 Oil on canvas, 86.8 x 106.4 cm.
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Painted such dramatic and sensitive evocations of the sea. Nolde created a series of thirteen autumn seascapes in 1910 alone – the series continued the following year. In *Herbstmeer VII* (Autumn Sea VII), the sea and the sky are almost indistinguishable. They are a fiery mass of orange, yellow and violet. Max Sauerlandt, museum director, supporter of Nolde and the artist's first biographer wrote in 1921:

"Nolde knows the sea as has no other artist before him. He sees it not from the beach or from a boat, he sees it as it exists in itself, free from any reference to man, eternally in motion, ever changing, living out its life in and for itself: a divine, self-consuming primal being that, in its unrestricted freedom, has existed unchanged since the very first day of creation".

It is noteworthy that Sauerlandt gives the sea, as it is seen through Nolde's eyes, a religious touch. Such interpretations of his work during the artist's lifetime augmented the image of Nolde as a "visionary" artist.



Nolde most often worked in relative isolation, painting his great religious pictures (see pp.86-89), for example, in Ruttebüll, on the North Sea coast. However, he spent most winters during this period in Berlin.

There, he threw himself into the city's heady social whirl, painting and drawing its gaudy nightlife, its progressive theatre productions and its fashionably louche café culture (see p.79). He was fascinated by modern popular and avant-garde dance. This interest manifested itself in the many wildly dancing figures that occur in his works, both biblical and secular.

In 1911 and 1912, in Alsen, Nolde worked on a new series of scenes from the life of Christ. They were finally assembled into the monumental polyptych, *Das Leben Christi* (The Life of Christ). It consists of a large central Crucifixion, with a haggard, yellow Christ, and eight smaller panels, flanking it on either side in the manner of an altarpiece. They include, on the left, scenes from Christ's nativity to the kiss of Judas and on the right,

Emil Nolde,
Summer Guests, 1911
Oil on canvas, 87 x 101 cm.
Brücke Museum, Berlin



scenes following Christ's death and resurrection. This powerful work was the centrepiece in a major Nolde exhibition at the Museum Folkwang in Hagen in 1912. However, plans to include the work in an international exhibition of religious art in Brussels had to be abandoned in the face of church protests. Along with other Expressionist works dealing with biblical subjects, Nolde's polyptych was also rejected from the Cologne Sonderbund exhibition that year. Nolde's religious paintings were always his most controversial. Expressionism – particularly of the uncompromising and wilful kind found in Nolde's work – was often acceptable even to liberal viewers only as long as it remained in the realm of the profane

In 1913, Nolde was offered the chance to join an official expedition organised by the German colonial office to New Guinea. In spite of the fact that they had to finance their own trip, he and his wife did not hesitate to go. This is not surprising given Nolde's intense interest in the art and culture of so-called "*Urvölker*" ("primitive peoples"). They left Germany in the autumn of 1913 and were away for nearly a year. The expedition travelled across Siberia, Korea, Japan, China and the Palau Islands, stopping at numerous other islands and German colonies on the way. In the course of the trip, Nolde made several hundred colour drawings, he painted large watercolours on Chinese rice paper and he was even able to produce nineteen oil paintings. One of these was *Papuajunglinge* (Young Men from Papua) (p.187). Nolde felt a particular affinity with the peasants and natives of the South Sea Islands, believing that they too had a special bond with their own land.

Nolde was a prolific printmaker as well as a painter. He produced woodcuts and etchings over many years and in many versions (see, for example, the discussion of his *Prophet*, p.29). Often the small graphic media were the means by which he explored the more fantastical realms of his imagination, nature's mysticism or local folklore. The imaginary figures in a 1922 etching are an example of how such works often combined the mysterious with the bizarre and even the faintly comic.

In spite of his *volkisch*-nationalist political sympathies, Nolde was forbidden to paint by the Nazis. His work was declared "degenerate". A massive total of 1,057 works by Nolde were confiscated from German museums – more than by any other artist. Thirty-one paintings and many graphics and watercolours were shown in the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in 1937.

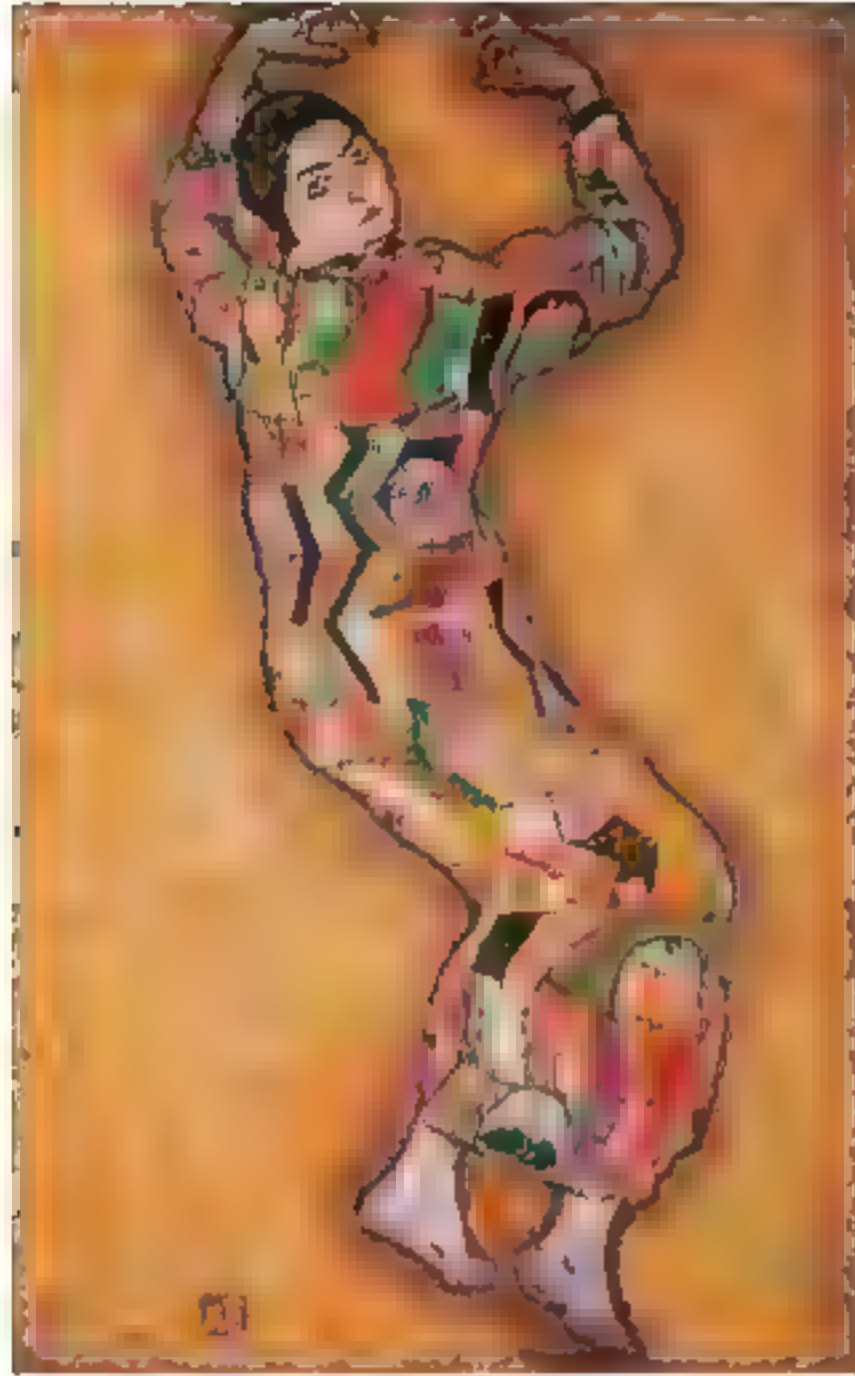
A centrepiece of the exhibition's first room, which the Nazi organisers devoted to Expressionist religious imagery, supposedly the product of "psychopathic graffitists" sold by "Jewish businessmen", was Nolde's *Life of Christ*. Many of his works were burned in 1939. Others were sold abroad. In spite of this, the seventy-year-old Nolde refused to leave his home in Seebüll. Made in secret with leftover, recycled and smuggled materials, facing the threat of discovery by the Gestapo's investigations, the small watercolours Nolde managed to produce during this time he called his "*ungemalte Bilder*" ("unpainted pictures"). *Der große Gärtner* (The Great Gardener) is an example. It is an image of a benevolent green-fingered God, tending life in the garden of his creation.

Nolde died in Seebüll in 1956. His will left instructions for the foundation of the *Stiftung Seebüll Ada und Emil Nolde*, where many of his most important works are kept today.

Emil Nolde,
Autumn Sea XI, 1910.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 88 cm.
Kunsthau Zurich, Zurich.

EGON SCHIELE

(1890 Tulln – 1918 Vienna)



Egon Schiele,
Portrait of Friederike Maria Beer, 1914.
 Oil on canvas, 190 x 120.5 cm.
 Private collection.

Egon Schiele,
Self-Portrait with Striped Shirt, 1910
 Black crayon, watercolour and gouache,
 44.3 x 30.6 cm
 The Leopold Collection, Vienna.

Egon Schiele's work is so distinctive that it resists categorisation. Admitted to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts at just sixteen, he was an extraordinarily precocious artist, whose consummate skill in the manipulation of line, above all, lent a taut expressivity to all his work. Profoundly convinced of his own significance as an artist, Schiele achieved more in his abruptly curtailed youth than many other artists achieved in a full lifetime. His roots were in the *Jugendstil* of the Viennese Secession movement. Like a whole generation, he came under the overwhelming influence of Vienna's most charismatic and celebrated artist, Gustav Klimt. In turn, Klimt recognised Schiele's outstanding talent and supported the young artist, who within just a couple of years, was already breaking away from his mentor's decorative sensuality.

Beginning with an intense period of creativity around 1910, Schiele embarked on an unflinching exposé of the human form – not least his own – so penetrating that it is clear he was examining an anatomy more psychological, spiritual and emotional than physical. He painted many townscapes, landscapes, formal portraits and allegorical subjects, but it was his extremely candid works on paper, which are sometimes overtly erotic, together with his penchant for using under-age models that made Schiele vulnerable to censorious morality. In 1912, he was imprisoned on suspicion of a series of offences including kidnapping, rape and public immorality. The most serious charges (all but that of public immorality) were dropped, but Schiele spent around three despairing weeks in prison.

Expressionist circles in Germany gave a lukewarm reception to Schiele's work. His compatriot, Kokoschka, fared much better there. While he admired the Munich artists of *Der Blaue Reiter*, for example, they rebuffed him. Later, during the First World War, his work became better known and in 1916 he was featured in an issue of the left-wing, Berlin-based Expressionist magazine *Die Aktion*. Schiele was an acquired taste. From an early stage he was regarded as a genius. This won him the support of a small group of long-suffering collectors and admirers but, nonetheless, for several years of his life his finances were precarious, he was often in debt and sometimes he was forced to use cheap materials, painting on brown wrapping paper or cardboard instead of artists' paper or canvas. It was only in 1918 that he enjoyed his first substantial public success in Vienna. Tragically, a short time later, he and his wife Edith were struck down by the massive influenza epidemic of 1918 that had just killed Klimt and millions of other victims, and they died within days of one another. Schiele was just 28 years old.

A photograph of Schiele by Anton Josef Trcka is one of a series taken in March 1914. These remarkable images concentrate on a range of facial expressions and hand gestures that correspond closely to the physical language of Schiele's drawings and paintings.





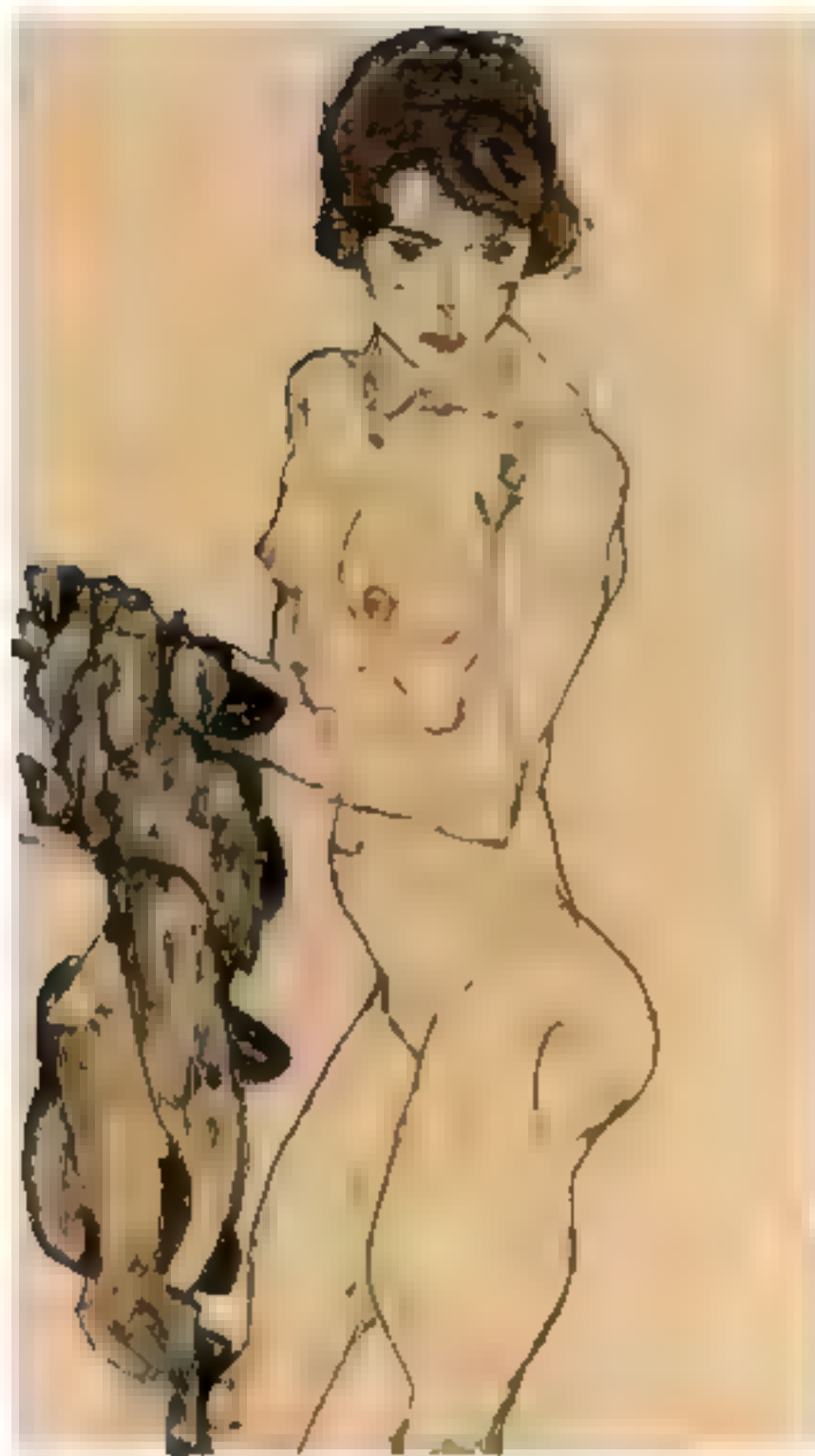
They give a sense of the performative manner in which Schiele used the face and body as a vehicle for expression. Hands, in particular, are often deeply expressive; at times they echo the gestures of prayer or benediction but more often they suggest – or betray – an underlying emotion or psychological state

There is a remarkable series of works on paper from 1910, in which Schiele eliminated all background detail or spatial context to focus uncompromisingly on his own or his models' bodies, isolated against a blank void. In his *Nude Self-Portrait, Grimacing*, for example, the artist's angular, distended limbs and splayed fingers perform a compelling silhouette upon the page. The facial grimace and taut twisting of the hands away from his own genitals suggest a powerful ambivalence towards the artist's own physicality and sexuality, wavering between visceral fascination and frozen discomfiture. There is an undeniable narcissism in the sheer volume of works in which Schiele examines his body – beautiful and ugly – and his temper in all emotional states. Even in the context of Expressionism, where the urge towards introspection and self-examination was commonplace, and the self-portrait genre almost de *rigueur*, there is no other artist who so unrelentingly elides the division between subject and object, exposing, exploring and reproducing the physical and psychological experience of the self as Schiele.

Another work on paper from the same year is *Female Nude*. The sure fluidity of Schiele's line, in thick black crayon, is amplified by the opaque white 'halo' around the figure. Schiele used this technique in several works of the period. It has the effect of enhancing the presence of the figure by underlining its isolation in space. The woman reclines, her half-closed eyes suggesting drowsiness, intoxication or even death. Schiele's figures often seem stripped of more than just their clothes (some critics unkindly likened his nudes to skinned rabbits) and here, the eye-sockets and nose cavity of the skull beneath the woman's skin are finely traced, reminding us of her underlying mortal structure. This work also demonstrates Schiele's assured confidence in the power of his line to convey the whole in paraphrase; both of the girl's legs 'end' where her stockings begin, and her arms are lacking altogether and yet none of the tangibility of the form is lost. Schiele's work often treads a fine line between the beautiful and the grotesque. Here, the sensuous curves of the woman's belly and hips are invaded by a gnarled hand. In fact, the hands in Schiele's work are almost always exaggeratedly long and bony, and the lack of arm connecting the hand to the woman's body is entirely in keeping with the skilful economy of Schiele's drawing. Nonetheless, the slight ambiguity that these kinds of ruptures introduce (whose hand is this?) is compelling.

Dead Mother I is a small painting in highly varnished oil on wood (p.53). The size, wooden block support, and mother-and-child subject prompt associations with the tradition of icon painting. The universal subject, revolving around the cycle of birth, life, and death is rooted in the Symbolist movement of the late nineteenth century. Beyond these comparisons, however, it is a highly original composition around a subject given a harrowing immediacy in the Expressionist vision. Shrouded in black, an unborn child, at the brink of birth, is locked in the loving, protecting, yet imprisoning body of its mother. The wan face of the mother, mournful in her own death, contrasts with the warm, living tones of the infant's

Egon Schiele,
Embrace (Lovers II), 1917.
Oil on canvas, 100 x 170.2 cm.
Belvedere, Vienna.



Egon Schiele

Standing Nude with Blue Sheet, 1914.

Gouache, watercolour and pencil,
48.3 x 32 cm.

Germanisches Nationalmuseum,
Nuremberg.

Egon Schiele,

Two Girls (Lovers), 1911.

Gouache, watercolour and oil pencil
on paper, 48.3 x 30.5 cm.

Private collection.

flesh, pulsating with blood. The child's hands already suggest nascent vitality and individuality. The subject was a fitting one for the artist who wrote "I love death and I love life". The connections between birth, sex and death were well known enough to Schiele. His mother had given birth to three still-born children before he and his sisters were born, an elder sister died at the age of ten and his father underwent a long deterioration during Schiele's adolescence before dying of the syphilis he had contracted many years earlier. Myth has it that Schiele painted this panel in just a few hours on Christmas Eve of 1910 – a date, of course, that adds a further symbolic dimension to the subject matter. Schiele did work with great rapidity and was proud of his own speed as an artist but 'a few hours' is still unlikely, given the detail of the underlying pencil drawing (visible through the thin layers of oils) and the careful composition.

By 1915, the range of Schiele's technique and subject matter had developed. He was now producing more allegorical subjects. A gouache and pencil drawing from that year, *Self-Portrait with Striped Armlets* (p. 191), was part of a group of images that culminated in a large painting called *Transfigurations* or *The Blind*. That a version of this figure became a blinded, allegorical self-representation helps to explain the vacant, unseeing stare of Schiele's widened eyes in this self-portrait. There is a clownish, puppet-like aspect to this figure conveyed by the orange hair, wooden hand gestures, bobbing, tilted head and even the striped sleeves of his costume, suggesting a carnival costume or jester's garb. This image can be seen as Schiele playing the role of the Fool, traditionally an observer, from the fringes, of society's madness. In formal terms, as an artist who had long renounced illusionistic perspective, Schiele did not shrink from the two-dimensionality of the picture plane. Like many of his works, this is an image that confines the figure to a flat plane of space and in so doing, affirms the 'flatness' of the artwork.

In the space of two weeks in June 1915, Schiele turned twenty-five, married, and was finally conscripted to begin the basic army training in Prague that, so far, he had been able to avoid. His new wife, Edith, was a respectable middle-class young woman. To marry her, Schiele had given up his working-class lover, model and partner of the previous few years, Valerie Neuzil (known as Wally). It is likely that Schiele's painting of an anguished couple in the throes of a dying relationship, painted of that year and known as *Death and the Maiden* was, in part, an autobiographical response to the end of the relationship. The male figure bears Schiele's features and what can be seen of the woman's face resembles Wally's features. Whether we see the painting in these literal terms, or as a more universal allegory (the theme is traditionally a cautionary *vanitas* image), it is a haunting subject. In a bleak and barren landscape emphasising the harshness of the outside world, two lovers cling to one another on a rumpled bedsheet. Their embrace is desperate but passionless, the male figure's deadly pallor, monastic robe and sightless gaze contrasting with the flushed cheeks of the woman in a nightdress.

Within a few years, Schiele's work was showing a new solidity marking a move away from Expressionism and towards a kind of classicism. It is not possible to know what more he may have achieved, for with his death in 1918, a short but extraordinarily creative career was cut short.



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 Constructivism	 New Realism	 Symbolism

Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, George Grosz, Emil Nolde, E.L. Kirchner, Paul Klee, Franz Marc as well as the Austrians Oskar Kokoschka and Egon Schiele were among the generation of highly individual artists who contributed to the vivid and often controversial new movement in early twentieth-century Germany and Austria: Expressionism. This publication introduces these artists and their work.

The author, art historian Ashley Bassie, explains how Expressionist art led the way to a new, intense, evocative treatment of psychological, emotional and social themes in the early twentieth century. The book examines the developments of Expressionism and its key works, highlighting the often intensely subjective imagery and the aspirations and conflicts from which it emerged while focusing precisely on the artists of the movement.